



Boys don't cry by FioSummers

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Summary: 80s AU. Popular cheerleader El Hopper and Hawkins High resident nerd Mike Wheeler don't really get along, in fact they don't even like one another...so why can't they keep their hands off each other?

1. Mike Wheeler and the cheerleader from he

"Boys don't cry"

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Plot: 80s AU. Popular cheerleader El Hopper and Hawkins High resident nerd Mike Wheeler don't really get along, in fact they don't even like each other, so why can't they keep their hands off each other?

Warnings: El is just awful here. Sorry. And this M for a reason, probably in later chapters.

Chapter 1. Mike Wheeler and the cheerleader from hell

The gym at Hawkins High was filled with stale, hot air; no doubt generated by the basketball practice that had just ended. Drenched teenagers were making their way towards the dressing rooms, leaving a trail of sweat and steam in their wake.

Mike crinkled his nose in disgust as he approached the bleachers, partly due to the air and partly due to the reason he was there to begin with. Cheerleading practice was supposed to have started thirty minutes ago, but because of a malfunctioning stereo, the squad was left without any music and thus were impatiently waiting for someone from the AV Club to come and fix it.

As the only available member of said Club that afternoon, Mike was the lucky bastard burdened with the colossal task of fixing it and dealing with the cheerleaders all by himself. Not that having any of his friends with him would have made much of a difference but still, the moral support would have been nice.

Oh joy.

The usual suspects were waiting edgily by the broken stereo. Mike didn't really know all the girls in the squad but for Jennifer Hayes,

Tammy Mason, Stacey Mitchell and of course El Hopper, the squad's legendary captain. And for him that was enough. He didn't need to know more about that particular segment of Hawkins High population.

Legendary my ass, Mike thought darkly as he approached them.

He didn't quite understand why everyone loved El Hopper so much. Or why would anyone think she was legendary. She was just a conceited, spoiled 17-year-old girl, who considered herself the Queen of all queens at school.

Ice queen is more like it.

And of course, her entourage of morons did nothing but feed her delusions of grandeur continuously by following her around like lost puppies and nodding 'yes' to every one of her whims.

Not that Mike had studied her or anything, it was a phenomenon that had been developing uninterruptedly and in plain sight since her rise to the top of the high school hierarchy, as his friend Dustin would put it. There was a time when she hadn't been a total bitch, when she had been a nice, quiet girl. There was a time when she had been his friend.

But that was a long time ago and these days Mike would rather die than bow before the Ice Queen. He may be a nerd, but at least he had a backbone and this year he had decided he was done taking shit from anyone.

The herd of vipers spotted him approaching but paid him no mind as he reached them. Not El, of course, she noticed him and shot him an arrogant glare sided with an evident air of superiority that made Mike want to puke on her trainers right then and there.

"Oh, it's you. Finally! What was your name again?" She asked in a half-exasperated, half-irritated tone.

God, I hate her.

"Mike. My name is Mike Wheeler. We've known each other since we were six". He answered dryly and very much annoyed. They had gone

to kinder garden together for Christ's sake!

"Right. So, Wheeler fix this for us, will you?" She told him authoritatively, not sparing him a second glance as she turned to her squad to continue their chat.

"Can you fix this, *please*?" He added slowly, as if he was teaching a little kid to be polite.

"What?" She snapped, turning to look at him, clearly annoyed.

Mike sighed exasperated and repeated, looking at her equally aggravated.

"You say: can you fix this, please? It won't kill you to show some manners you know".

She had the decency to blush, visibly embarrassed, but the ice returned within a fraction of a second.

"Whatever". She huffed, rolling her eyes and looking pissed at his reprimand.

Serves her right.

Her entourage just giggled stupidly, not really deeming their captain as the rude idiot she was being. This encouraged El, who turned to look at Mike smirking maliciously.

"Jeez, don't get your Star Wars undies in a twist Wheeler". She taunted, and the cheerleaders sniggered madly.

"Be a good boy and fix the stereo so we can start our practice and you can be on your way to play video games or whatever it is that you and your nerdy friends do every day". She added mockingly, earning her more laughter from the brainless bunch that were her friends.

Mike felt his face turn to a treacherous shade of red and grow so hot he felt like he was burning. A mix of humiliation and anger invaded him completely and his temper flared dangerously. His hands turned into fists at his sides and he counted to ten quickly in his head to avoid doing something rash like lifting the stereo and smashing it

into the ground, or something even worst.

"Fine!" He spat, turning around and starting to walk towards the exit of the gym; fingers still digging into the palm of his hands and a hateful gaze marring his face. He was seeing red and El and her friends had the audacity to laugh at him once more.

"C'mon Wheeler, there is no need to get snippy". She shouted comically, putting on a show for the squad.

"Fuck off, Hopper. See who fixes your precious stereo now". He retorted angrily and exited the gym, slamming the doors with violent force.

The laughter died, and the cheerleaders looked at each other awkwardly and then looked at their fearless leader.

"Good job, El. Now we don't have any music or money to buy a new stereo". Stacey admonished testily.

"Oh, shut up Stacey!" El snapped rolling her eyes, visibly annoyed. Then she smiled sweetly before adding:

"I'm sure if you ask his friend Justin or whatever his name is, he will fix it for us. He drools every time you pass him by in the halls, it's only natural that if you ask him nicely he will say yes". She told her mockingly.

The others giggled, and it was Stacey's turn to roll her eyes.

"Sure, now I'm the one who has to fix this mess, just because you couldn't be decent to the only guy in the whole school who could help us today. We are already way behind as it is". She rebutted not really trying to dissimulate her annoyance.

"What? It's not my fault he's such a delicate, sensitive boy...". She countered sarcastically.

"That wasn't nice, and you know it". Stacey stated, staring at her disapprovingly.

Tired of having to explain herself and very irritated by the fact that

they were still debating over the stupid incident, El cut the discussion short.

"Whatever Stacey. Let's start the warm up, c'mon everyone, on your feet!" Captain El was back in place and cheerleading practice had officially started.

The next morning Mike was still pissed. Fortunately, he didn't have any classes with El today so at least he would be in peace without having to see her stupid face. Hopefully anyway, there was always the chance he could run into her in one of the hallways. Not that it would make a difference, she would ignore him as she did with everyone who wasn't part of her 'popular' inner circle.

The morning went by without incident and Mike saw the lunch period as an opportunity to vent to his friends about what had happened the day before and maybe use it as an outlet for his anger. When he entered the cafeteria, he went straight to the counter to order his food and then headed to their usual table, where his friends were already eating.

"Hey guys". He greeted as he sat down beside Will. His annoyance must have showed on his face because Max noticed it instantly.

"What's up with you? You look twitchy". She observed as she popped a nugget into her mouth.

"Yeah buddy, I feel a great disturbance in the Force". Dustin agreed, goofily adding a Star Wars' reference for his friend's benefit. Mike gave him a half-smile, thankful for his noble intentions.

"Don't tell me, this has to do with your visit to our esteemed cheerleading squad yesterday afternoon". Lucas guessed without malice, even if he sounded a bit ironic.

"How did you...?" Mike tried to ask but cut himself resignedly. "Yes, that's it".

"I just know how they get into your nerves, especially Hopper so I kinda figured that something must have happened with them". He

explained shrugging. Lucas knew better than any of their friends the deeper reasons behind Mike's dislike for El.

Mike sighed and started his tale, while his friends listened attentively. When he finished, Will was the first to comment.

"You know, that is strange, whenever she's been over to our house she has always been nice and polite. My mom even loves it when she visits with Hopper". He explained, mildly surprised about what Mike had just told them.

Will's mom had recently begun a relationship with Hawkins' chief of police Jim Hopper, an old classmate of hers and coincidentally the father of one bothersome cheerleader El Hopper. It wasn't something that Mike really thought about, seeing as it was none of his business, but up to that point he hadn't realized that this new-found romance implied that Will had to exchange pleasantries with the Ice Queen on regular basis.

"Well, maybe she hasn't been over at your house that much, because I can't detect even a trace of niceness anywhere near her". Mike protested unconvinced.

"Maybe it's just good acting, you know all sweet, preppy El in the presence of adults and a heartless harpy when she gets to school" Lucas added thoughtfully.

"Ah...well, it is weird. We actually get along quite well. She likes music, so when she's over we listen to Jonathan's records. In fact, she loves The Cure, which is awesome". He said a bit embarrassed, suddenly feeling as if he had revealed some dark secret about himself.

"*The* what?" Mike exclaimed frowning.

"The Cure, it's a band. British, kinda goth but not really? They're pretty cool". Will explained.

Mike still looked puzzled. Whether it was because he didn't have a clue about the band Will was talking about or because of the revelation that El Hopper could be anything but horrible; it was

difficult to tell.

"How come you've never told us that you were so chummy with the Ice Queen?" Dustin asked suspiciously, interrupting Mike's train of thought.

"I don't know. I guess I didn't think it was important..." Will answered hesitantly, shrugging slightly.

"Well I'm just glad that if you have to be in her presence she doesn't treat you like vermin, even if it's just a façade". Mike concluded indifferently, wanting to end the subject.

"Speak of the devil". Lucas remarked, nodding towards the cafeteria's doors where El Hopper was coming through followed by Tammy, Stacey and Jennifer. They took a seat at their usual table and soon after some of the school jocks joined them. One of them, the handsomest, greeted Tammy with a hug and a lingering kiss while El observed them slyly.

"Look at her watching Tammy and Brad, what's the deal with that?" Dustin commented interestedly.

"Well rumor has it that even though she has done it with half of the basketball team –or so they say– she also desperately wants Brad Johnson, but well he's off limits for her since he's dating one of her best friends". Max informed them giving herself an air of importance at being their only reliable source of gossip.

Apparently, the rumors about the popular brunette abounded and Max was privy to all the juicy details shared in the girl's locker room about the legendary cheerleading captain.

"I don't think she has any moral code whatsoever, so I hardly believe that just because he's dating her friend she won't make a move on him sooner or later". Mike reckoned severely.

"C'mon Mike, don't be cruel". Will admonished, feeling that his friend was going too far with his sudden hatred for El.

He knew Mike hadn't been fond of her since her return to Hawkins, but he didn't understand why the unexpected revival of his

vindictiveness.

"I'm sorry Will, but that mirage you described as El Hopper is a complete fantasy to me. That's simply not her". He explained, and Will couldn't hold his curiosity any longer.

"Why does she suddenly bother you so much Mike?"

Mike seemed to think about it for a moment before answering.

"I don't know. Maybe it's because I hadn't really talked to her since she moved back and yesterday I had to, and it brought back some memories from when we were kids". Mike answered shrugging.

"You knew her as a kid?!" Max asked surprised. "Didn't she move here when she was fifteen?"

Mike nodded.

"Yes, but she lived here before that. We became very good friends in kinder garden, before you or Dustin moved here. Then she moved to Indianapolis when we turned ten and we never spoke again". He paused, tuning his gaze briefly towards the girl in question.

"Years later she moved back looking like that and becoming extremely popular from the moment she walked through those doors." He finished quietly.

"Wow, that's so fucked up". Max exclaimed disbelievingly.

"It's like the El I knew never existed. A completely different person. And I guess I was alright about it, you know? Not really dwelling on it, I mean some friendships just break apart right? But I suppose that watching her actually pretend she didn't know me and picking on me, really made me angry". Mike explained bitterly.

"Did you try to talk to her when she moved back?" Max asked curiously.

"Yeah, I did. On the first day she came back to school I tried to say 'hi' but she was already with her band of idiots and completely ignored me. I got the hint and didn't look back, not until yesterday at

least".

Truth is, he had always been a bit bitter about El's blatant disregard for him. Sure, he didn't think about it much, but that didn't mean he had forgotten or that he hadn't been hurt by her attitude when she came back to Hawkins.

They all fell silent, contemplating Mike's story. Sensing the darkening in their moods, Mike decided to change the subject.

"Let's talk about something else guys. Are we going to the arcade this weekend?"

The topic seemed to bring their enthusiasm back and they burst into excited talk about their plans to beat the existing scores, moving on swiftly to enquire about Mike's latest campaign for Dungeons and Dragons.

Soon after, the bell rang, and the group of friends left for their last classes of the day, all thoughts of El Hopper happily forgotten.

2. That blasted history project!

AN. Thanks for all your comments! :) So, El does have some issues and while she's not entirely evil, she's gotten a taste of power now that she's popular, and she's not about to let it slip through her fingers any time soon. However, life is all about teaching us valuable lessons and she is about to learn one.

Chapter 2. That blasted history project!

Next Monday morning found a well-rested Mike biking towards school. He was feeling quite well after a weekend filled with time well spent amongst his friends. He was even looking forward to his history class first thing in the morning, even if *she* was going to be there.

Mike pushed that thought out of his head as he made it to the bike rack at the school parking lot. Dustin and Lucas were already there, passionately bickering about some thing or other. Mike smiled warmly, some things never change.

"Hey Mike!" Both Lucas and Dustin welcomed, smiling at his friend as he pulled over in front of them.

"Hi guys". Mike greeted, dismounting his bike. He parked it into the rack and secured the lock carefully.

Right at the same time, a breeze of red hair reached them and circled around them skating rapidly.

"What's up nerds?!" Max said, smirking lightly. She stopped in front of Lucas, leaving her skateboard aside and throwing her arms around him. She proceeded to kiss him thoroughly in greeting.

"Eww, gross! It's way too early for that Mayfield". Mike complained, making a disgusted face.

Max didn't even bat an eyelid at his comment, opting for flipping him off and continuing her ministrations on Lucas' lips.

Mike rolled his eyes in fake annoyance and turned to look at Dustin, as if asking him for help. His curly haired friend just shrugged indifferently.

"That's loveeeeeeee Michael". He mocked. "One day, when you're a big boy you'll find a lady that will make your toes curl and you will want to kiss her all the time, much as our beloved couple over here". He finished, making a demonstrative motion with his hands, signaling to a still very much lip-locked Max and Lucas.

"That's true". Lucas managed to say as he separated his lips from Max's for a moment before kissing her again.

Mike snorted amusedly.

"You guys are the worst". He said affectionately.

Soon though, their attention was diverted from their bantering, as Chief Hopper's old Blazer pulled over in front of the school, near to where they were standing. The passenger door opened, and El Hopper got out of the car. She pulled the seat over and they saw Will make his way out swiftly, thanking her quietly. She nodded, smiling politely and turned to look at her dad.

"See you later dad!" She said, before reaching out to him through the door and hugging him quickly.

"Later kiddo". Hopper replied, ruffling her hair fondly.

She smiled grabbing her backpack, which was still in the car seat and turned to Will.

"Bye Will!" She said smiling warmly. Her smile disappeared though, when she noticed she had an audience. Instead, a mask of indifference covered her face. The Ice Queen was back.

"See you El. Thanks for the ride Chief". Will said as he saw El make her way into the school, without sparing another glance at his friends.

"Any time kid". The Chief answered, giving him a half-smile. Will shut the door and Hopper went on his way.

When he turned towards his friends, he was met with four pair of eyes; all sporting the same questioning, accusatory look.

"What? He offered to give me a ride! And I was running late as it is". He answered defensively.

"Look at you, fraternizing with the enemy. You make me sick Byers". Dustin remarked, being overly dramatic.

"Oh, shut it Dustin". Will said rolling his eyes and chuckling lightly at his terrible impression of a movie gangster.

The others laughed quietly. Mike joined in, though not really finding the whole thing *that* amusing. Still, he wasn't about to let anything ruin his good mood today.

"C'mon guys, we're going to be late for first period. Let Will deal with the Ice Queen as he sees fit". He said, trying to trivialize the matter.

"Thank you, Mike, for showing a modicum of common sense". Will replied using a patronizing tone just for Dustin's benefit.

"Now you see dear William, I don't like that tone..." Dustin tried to explain, a bit self-importantly.

"Oh my god! Let it go Dustin!" Max cut him off exasperated.

"But Max..." He whined, and the others laughed.

"No. I don't want to hear it. Let's go. Now". Her tone left no place for arguments and the boys knew at this point that when Max was being serious, it wasn't a good idea to cross her.

"Soooo, class?" Mike dared to ask, sounding sheepishly.

"Right, class". She declared and taking Lucas' hand in hers, she started to make her way inside.

The others just looked at each other amusingly before trailing behind them hurriedly.

At that moment, Mike marveled at how lucky he really was to have

these friends and a life like his, marked by real and loyal friendships. Not the fragile, fake and shallow ones that some people like El Hopper and her popular crowd shared.

Though, if Mike thought that everything in his life was like a walk in the clouds, and that the start of the school year couldn't get any worse after his encounter with the Ice Queen the week before; he was sorely mistaken. Life was about to get just a little bit more interesting.

In History he took his usual seat in front of the class and waited patiently for Ms. Roberts to arrive. There were still five minutes left before the lesson was due to start. Suddenly the door opened, but it wasn't their teacher who stepped in. It was just El and Tammy, early for once in their lives and chatting as if they hadn't arrived to a classroom full of students.

"Oh Tammy, you should have seen the look on his face! As if he could ever stand a chance with me..." El was saying disbelievingly, as if the individual, subject of her rant, had broken some sacred golden rule by even daring to talk to her.

Mike rolled his eyes.

What poor bastard would want to date her?

But as she passed by his desk, Mike's treacherous eyes couldn't help but notice her legs, her beautiful long legs, showcasing themselves in all of their glory under her cheerleading uniform.

He blushed. Furiously.

The door opened again, and Ms. Roberts entered, breaking him out of his thoughts. He was silently relieved and immensely grateful for her timely arrival. He didn't want to keep thinking about any of Hopper's body parts. No matter how hot they were.

Hot?!

Deeply disturbed by the betrayal orchestrated by his own hormones, Mike glowered moodily. Though his inner tantrum was short-lived as

Ms. Roberts' voice resounded through the quiet classroom.

"Good morning class. Before starting today's lecture, I'm going to give you this semester's assignment. You will be paired up randomly and will have to write a 7500 words' essay about a topic of your choosing, as long as it belongs to this year's syllabus. Additionally, you will have to do a presentation for your classmates".

Mike groaned. He hated pairing up for assignments, it usually meant that he would end up being the only one doing any actual work.

"Right, so Jones you are with Mathews, Penn you are with Porter, Hopper you are with Wheeler; Mason..."

Time stopped, and he couldn't hear anything else after Ms. Roberts had the audacity of pronouncing his last name in the same sentence as the Ice Queen's.

He panicked.

"Oh god, just kill me please". He whispered to himself desperately.

"Excuse me Ms. Roberts but Tammy and I, we always work together". El interrupted, in a petulant voice.

"I'm sorry Hopper, pairings are final". Ms. Roberts answered simply but using a tone that evidently declared that the matter was closed.

El's eyes narrowed scornfully but she nodded quietly, accepting her fate resignedly. Her gaze then turned to Mike and she sighed miserably, though the reproach he could detect in her eyes undoubtedly indicated that she believed that this fateful pairing was somehow his fault.

As if!

Mike ignored her and paid attention to Ms. Roberts, who had finished giving them the pairings and was now beginning that Monday's lecture about World War II.

Some 45 minutes later, when the lesson came to an end, El approached his desk purposely.

"Wheeler. We should talk". She told him simply. Mike just looked at her, arching his eyebrow challengingly. Seeing his questioning look, she rolled her eyes and added: "Please".

"You are starting to learn, Hopper. Good for you". He mocked, getting his notebook and pens into his backpack.

"Look, can we meet after school today to discuss this project?" She asked tensely.

"No".

"What?!" She almost shouted hysterically.

"No". He remarked again nonchalantly.

"Why the hell not?" She was pissed now, and Mike decided to infuriate her even more.

"Did I say no? I meant yes. I'll be at the library". He said sweetly, pretending to be apologetic and quickly making his way out of the classroom, without giving her time to utter an answer.

El stared after him, mouth agape and bile rising in her throat. She closed her mouth into a tight-lipped scowl and went in search of Tammy to walk with her towards her next class.

"Sucks you got stuck with Wheeler El". Tammy commented, as El reached her desk, where she was still packing her bag.

"I know". She groaned.

"Well, at least you can chuck the work to him and have some fun while does the assignment".

"I guess you're right". El agreed, trying to sound optimistic though not entirely convinced.

An apprehensive look appeared on her face momentarily, but it was gone a second later. Doubts about the project assaulted her and despite what Tammy had said, she didn't want Mike to do everything by himself, she enjoyed learning and had good grades to maintain.

The challenge would be to come out unscathed from this and to actually produce a decent essay...if they didn't kill each other first.

El took a deep breath and followed Tammy out of the classroom, these unsolved issues would have to wait until this afternoon.

At 3:30 pm Mike was already seated in one of the library's tables, reading a book while El got there. He was slightly anxious about the encounter. Not because he was afraid of her or something, but because he knew it was going to be difficult that both of them agreed on anything. He was sure she would just contradict him on any of his suggestions just to spite him.

The sound of the library's doors opening interrupted his thoughts. In walked El, rushed and marching rapidly towards him.

"You're late". He stated flatly.

"I'm aware of it Wheeler. Can we hurry this thing? I've got cheerleading practice". She answered prickly, as she put her backpack on the table and took a seat.

"You're the one who came in late, so don't..."

"I know, I know!" She said impatiently but didn't apologize for her tardiness. "So, I've got a couple of ideas..." She started saying and Mike didn't have more choice than to listen to her for the next few minutes.

When she finished talking, he was surprised about what she was proposing. She hadn't sounded like the stupid cheerleader he thought she had become. She was...actually smart.

"So, what do you think?" Her question brought Mike out his thoughts.

"Ah, well I was thinking about the Russian Revolution, but I agree that writing about the rise of the Roman Empire it's a good move, seeing as it will be one of the subjects that we won't be studying in such depth as the others".

She nodded affirmatively.

"Maybe we could start by doing some research and meet again tomorrow? After that we could meet possibly once a week for the next three months and of course, work by ourselves at home once we've got our outline defined". She suggested, carefully describing her plan.

Once again Mike was surprised by the clarity with which she seemed to have grasped the essay's structure and her quick mental skill to come up with such a good plan in such a short time. He couldn't find any flaws in her logic or her proposal on how to go about writing their paper.

He hated to admit it, but he was impressed with this new-found fact about El Hopper.

Before today, he had thought she passed her classes with minimum effort and that her head was only filled with thoughts about pom-poms and boys. She seldomly participated in class or commented on any of their assigned readings, keeping mostly to herself.

Nevertheless, he wasn't about to make it easier on her. He couldn't let her know he agreed on everything she had just said. He was going to play hard to get, if only to make her blood boil at first, because he knew they would end up doing what she had proposed.

"Yeah...no I don't think so. I sure as hell don't want to see your face that often". He told her defiantly, arching his eyebrow.

That seemed to anger her, and she frowned. Frustration invaded her face.

"Then what do you propose, oh mighty god of all that's nerd?" She said testily, voice dripping with sarcasm.

He snorted at her insult.

"I don't know, but certainly not that". He answered simply.

"Aren't you supposed to be like the smartest kid in Hawkins High or something? C'mon Wheeler, solve this problem!" El exclaimed, already at her wit's end.

"Make me". He challenged petulantly.

She rolled her eyes, visibly exasperated.

"Now you're just being childish".

"No, you are being childish! And impractical. The schedule you suggested doesn't work for me, I've got things to do". Mike was aware that he sounded like a five-year-old but somehow, he didn't seem to care.

It was her turn to snort.

"Things like what? Catalogue rocks? Read comic books? Masturbate to Princess Leia's picture?" She asked acidly, smirking evilly.

And for the second time that day, Mike blushed in the presence of El Hopper.

"That's none of your business". He said flatly, mentally trying to disperse the hotness from his face.

"It is when it has the potential to affect my grades!" She retorted angrily.

"Oh sure, because you care so much about those..." He taunted sarcastically, and that made her snap.

"I don't have time for this!" She practically shouted, earning them an angry 'Shhhh' from the nearby librarian. El stood up and grabbed her backpack, preparing herself to leave.

"I don't give a damn about what you decide. If you want in on this project I'll be here tomorrow afternoon, if not, then I'll do it myself". She whispered angrily, turning on her heel and stepping away from their table.

"Rawrrr...the lioness has claws!" He mocked behind her back, mimicking the claws with his hands.

She turned her head and simply flipped him off, storming out the library without looking back.

Mike just stared after her, a triumphant smile slowly forming on his face.

Mike 1, Hopper 0.

...despite the fact that she did guess about one of his favorite activities involving Leia...

3. Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me

AN. Thank you so much for following the story, for your comments, kudos and favorites! I greatly appreciate them :)

We get to see a bit of El's thoughts here. This is not El's justification to what happened to her with Mike, but you get to see some insights on her.

Lyrics are from "Just like heaven" by The Cure, written and composed by Boris Williams / Laurence Andrew Tolhurst / Porl Thompson / Robert James Smith / Simon Gallup. Lyrics of Just Like Heaven © Universal Music Publishing Group.

Chapter 3. Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me

El Hopper was having the most terrible day. She had come in late to school and had gotten a reprimand because of it. Enduring old McFarland's scolding hadn't been pretty, especially in front of her classmates.

Then, at lunch, she had to tolerate Troy Harrington's slimy hands trying to grab her ass as he made a pass at her in the cafeteria. Every other day, the bastard would try to touch her or say crude words to her, as if that would ever get him close to her giving into his advances.

El was used to guys being like that with her. They thought that only because she was a cheerleader, she was dumb and practically school property, so it was ok to harass her. On top of that, the rumors about her didn't help at all. The truth was she had let them grow to what they were today, after all, there's no such a thing as bad publicity.

So, what if they thought she had fucked the entire basketball team? Let them talk. She didn't care.

But she had to admit it was tiresome to deal with this sort of attitude all the time, not to mention never being taken seriously by any guy she liked. They all wanted to get into her pants as soon as possible.

That's the price you pay for being popular I guess. She thought cynically as she reached her locker.

That's why she liked Will Byers, he was nice to her, he didn't seem to have any hidden agenda and he had good taste in music. She liked to hang out with him whenever she visited the Byers household with Hopper. Besides her dad, Will felt like the only sincere relationship she had these days.

She sighed wearily when she remembered that her day wasn't going to get any better. She still had to see Mike this afternoon to go about their stupid project.

El didn't know what to do about him. She knew she had hurt him all those years ago when she came back, that's why he couldn't stand the sight of her. After that first day, when she practically ignored him, everything had just escalated quickly, and she knew there was no going back now. She had ruined everything.

It was not surprising that he had given up on her. She couldn't blame him really, she hadn't made any effort to revert the situation, to, even, apologize to him. She had felt ashamed of herself, and convinced that sweet, little Mike Wheeler didn't need someone as jaded as her in his life. So, she hadn't look back, letting him think that she had indeed turned into the archetype of virtually every popular cheerleader in the world.

Had she really become that archetype though? Maybe she had...she didn't know anymore.

Bottomline was that Mike hated her, and it was her own fault. But she couldn't seem to stop pushing him away, the further away he was from her the better for him it would be. The person she had become wasn't someone who deserved to have a friend like Mike.

Getting herself together, she got a couple of books from her locker and headed towards the library, there was work to do.

Begrudgingly, Mike went to the library that afternoon. After looking for El among the many tables, he found her between the stacks,

seated cross-legged on the floor and surrounded by books. Her curly hair was up in a messy bun, made up with a pencil, and her face was scrunched up in concentration as she softly sang to the lyrics of whatever song she was listening to on her Walkman.

You, soft and only, you lost and lonely

You, strange as angels

Dancing in the deepest oceans

Twisting in the water

You're just like a dream

You're just like a dream

He thought she looked pretty and approachable, a far cry from her insufferable, usual self. So, Mike just stood there, watching her quietly, entranced by the sight of her, so unnatural and lovely. One could almost pretend she was as nice as she looked.

The spell was broken when she looked up from the book she was reading and realized he was there. El pushed the stop button, took off her headphones and arched her eyebrow questioningly, though she didn't utter a single word.

Mike cleared his throat awkwardly.

"I resigned myself to the fact that there's no use in going against you". He said, explaining his presence at the library.

She smiled victoriously.

"Now you're getting it Wheeler. Pick a book. Right now, I'm trying to make a list of the sub topics I would like to include in the paper. Is that alright with you?"

He nodded, taking off his backpack and sitting in front of her on the floor. He started browsing through the covers while she looked at him contemplatively, before breaking the silence.

"Admit it, you think my plan is a great plan". She taunted lightheartedly.

His eyes widened at her teasing and he exaggerated his answer.

"Like hell I will admit to anything!"

She gave him a smug look. She wasn't buying it. Not one bit.

"Right. Back to work then". She said, still sporting her mischievous smile.

"What were you listening to anyway? And why were you singing in the library? And off key, if I might add". He asked curiously, in part because he wanted to know and in part because he wanted to annoy her.

"Why do you care?" She asked, getting defensive.

"I don't. I just thought the lyrics were cool".

"Really?" She asked disbelievingly (*maybe excitedly?*), taken aback by his sudden interest.

He shrugged.

"It's not only you who enjoys music, Hopper". He told her coolly.

"I guess you're right. It's a song by The Cure, do you know them?". She asked shyly.

"Sure, who doesn't know The Cure. British, kind of gothic. They're awesome". Mike didn't understand what made him lie about his knowledge of the band.

What the hell? He wasn't trying to impress her...was he?!

"Oh, cool. Yeah, they're my favorite band. This song it's called 'Just like Heaven', it's part of their last album, the one that just came out". She explained warmly.

There was a passion in the way she spoke about music that he found

alluring. But then he noticed the civilized nature of the conversation they were having, and it made him feel uncomfortable.

Confused for a moment, he spoke.

"Right...well, we didn't come here to talk about music, did we?" He stated dryly.

Something shifted in her eyes and all the passion was replaced by coldness.

"No. I guess we didn't". She agreed flatly, returning to her book.

They remained quiet for a long time, each focused on the book they were going through, sometimes taking notes and, in El's case, humming softly. She was again listening to her music, they didn't really have anything to talk about so there was no point in reading silently.

Mike on the other hand, was trying to appear focused and nonchalant, but he kept stealing glances at her, amused by her carefree demeanor and how pretty she looked. Somehow, seeing her seated there so relaxed, amid a sea of books and singing happily; made him see her in such a different light.

It was...strange.

"You are staring again". She remarked simply, without even taking her eyes off her book.

He blushed and looked away.

"As if! Why would I be looking at you? You're not even pretty!". He exclaimed, indignantly, as if she had accused him of some heinous crime.

Mike was secretly hoping his tone of voice would persuade her of forgetting the matter and changing the subject quickly. Never mind he sounded super lame.

El just arched her eyebrow and raised her hands in mock surrender.

"Chill out Wheeler, it was just an observation".

"Yes well, I wasn't". He rushed to say.

"You weren't what?" She asked lazily, almost disinterested, while she browsed through the book she was holding.

He sighed frustratedly.

"You know..."

"No, I don't". She answered, still sounding indifferent.

"Staring at you. I wasn't, I mean..." He clarified impatiently.

"Of course not, not pretty enough, right?" She asked, raising her eyes to look at him intently, almost searchingly.

He gulped. Right now, he didn't know what the hell was happening to him. He didn't know why he was suddenly nervous and second-guessing himself in front of her.

"Right. Not at all". He managed to croak weakly.

"Cool. You don't have to worry about it anyway, it's not like we like each other or something. So, after this thing is over we can go back to not speaking to each other, ever again". She explained simply, again focused solely on her book.

"Yes, exactly". Mike agreed unconvincingly.

She looked at him, nodded, and gave him an undiscernible sort of smile. He thought it may be sad, but truthfully, he couldn't tell.

Mike took the hint that this conversation was over and returned to his book. About half an hour later, El spoke again.

"I'm thinking there is a lot to cover on the Roman Empire, maybe we should choose some of the main milestones and go from there?"

"But why the milestones? We could just do a division of eras marked by emperors". He suggested.

"Hmm...but won't that take forever to do?"

"Well, yes. But there is two of us and we have three months to do it".

She seemed to think on it and responded.

"I don't know Wheeler, it seems very unlikely to me. You have to remember that we have other things to do besides this project".

He rolled his eyes.

"Oh sure, god forbid you missing out on one cheerleading practice". He exclaimed, sounding inexplicably annoyed.

"That's not what I meant. I was talking about our other classes remember? It's not only history we have to worry about". She replied, already getting exasperated by him.

"Sure, this doesn't have to do with your bubbling social life...of course not". He taunted.

"Shut up Wheeler". El practically shouted, feeling cross.

"Ohhhhhhh!" He exclaimed, faking realization. "I get it know: too many dates! Poor El Hopper has too many suitors". He mocked maliciously.

"Suitors'? What are you, Shakespearean or something?" She retorted, getting really annoyed and kneeling closer to him until she was in front of him. Her hands were curled into fists at her sides, as if she was trying to contain her growing anger.

Mike smiled smugly.

"So that's it, isn't it? You've got to take care of your...errrr... 'duties' as the most popular cheerleader in school". He explained conversationally, as he exemplified what her 'duties' were with a lewd gesture of his hands.

Instantly, she felt hurt by his crude behavior. Somehow, she didn't like Mike thinking she was a slut, even if, so far, she hadn't done anything to appease the rumors that she was one.

Then she felt hot anger consume her and she slapped him. Hard.

Immediately though she retracted her hand and covered her mouth in a gesture of shock. She hadn't intended to do that but taking in his judgmental posture and the hurtful nature of his words, bothered her more than she could explain.

Mike was also shocked, silently holding his cheek, trying in vain to soothe the stinging ache. He was staring at her wide-eyed, stunned by her unexpected reaction to his jibe. And then her eyes were suddenly filled with regret and apologies, and he felt surprisingly awful about hurting her.

"I...I'm so..." Her apology was cut off by a blur of freckles and unruly black hair.

Suddenly, luscious red lips were on hers; motionless, though pressing insistently. Her brain ceased to function momentarily, and her body reacted instead, giving herself into the sensations his lips were creating. He noticed her reaction and deepened the contact, bringing his hand to caress her cheek and tentatively using his tongue to lick her lips softly.

El moaned at the intensity of the kiss and brought her hands to his neck, holding him tightly and stroking the hairs at the back of his neck lazily. She opened her mouth and his tongue sought hers in a passionate dance, matching each other's movements one by one.

A crash of some books falling to the floor somewhere in the library brought them back to reality and out of their haze. They opened their eyes and looked shockingly at each other. Both panicked and scrambled away, hitting the furthest part of the stacks they could reach.

"I...I need to leave". El said, standing up so quickly and practically running out of the library; leaving her Walkman behind and the books she had been consulting, all scattered around the floor.

He sighed dejectedly, still puzzled by her behavior. Still puzzled by *his* behavior.

What just happened?

Mike barely slept that night. He couldn't get the memory of El's lips brushing passionately against his own out of his mind. He kept replaying the whole scene in his head, feeling a mixture of arousal, surprise and anxiety; all jumbled into a fantastic mess along with other unidentified feelings.

Of course he found her beautiful, even if he opted to deny it flatly to her face, and he was a hormonal teenage boy after all...but this was Hopper. Cheerleader from hell Hopper. Ice Queen Hopper, the meanest, coldest girl ever in all Hawkins High. He didn't like her. He practically hated her for god's sake.

Then why did it feel so good to kiss her? Why did it feel so right? To feel her hands on his neck and her breasts pressed together against his...Mike suddenly felt hot all over and his body broke into a cold sweat, reacting eagerly to the memories he was thinking about.

He groaned at the sight of his predicament, proudly tightening the front of his boxers, making his mortification grow even more.

Things got even worse when minutes later he dealt with the problem in the shower. Sadly, not in the way any dignified man should have (if you take into consideration that the object of your fantasies is one of the people you despise the most), but by touching himself while he recalled yesterday's events and coming undone with her name on his lips.

It was not one of Mike's finest moments.

And as he biked to school that morning, there was only one question flying around his mind.

Why did I kiss her?

El didn't fare any better.

After she ran from the library, she ended up taking refuge within the small forest located at the back of the school. Breathing harshly,

heart pounding and brain in overdrive. She sat down tiredly on a fallen log, taking her head in her hands in frustration.

She stayed there for a while, until the day got cold and the sun started to disappear. All the while feeling baffled and scared. El didn't understand what had happened, but moreover she didn't understand why that physical act, so simple, yet so powerful; had made her feel so warm. So...cherished.

Obviously, she knew Mike didn't harbor any feelings for her other than contempt, nor did she want him to feel anything for her at all. But then, why did his kisses make her feel like this? And why did he kiss her?

Mike hates me. This doesn't make any sense.

She sighed, got up and started the walk towards home, her dad was probably waiting for her already.

As she walked, El thought about her previous encounters with boys, trying to decipher why this one had been so different from any of the other kisses she had ever received. She was no expert in matters of the heart or even sexually experienced, so to say she felt confused was an understatement.

Before becoming El Hopper, cheerleader *extraordinaire*, boys had been unimportant to her. Well, except for Mike when she was little, and he was her friend. But after that, kissing boys became just a challenge in a game of 'Truth or dare', or a task for '7 minutes in heaven'. She dated a few guys here and there, mostly succumbing to the pressure of Tammy and the others, but never really feeling anything for them.

Everyone thought she was this hot, popular chick, that could have any boy she wanted, and that therefore she did. Or at least, people *thought* she did. Truly, she just went along for the ride. Most of the time she was busy with school and cheerleading, not really paying attention to boys, other than to defend herself from jerks like Troy.

Her ambition and determination deterred her from opening to romantic entanglements and the stream of idiots she seemed to meet

on daily basis didn't help either. She wanted what Tammy and Brad had. They loved each other so much and they had so much fun together. Sometimes she felt so weird to stare at them so longingly, but they were just so cute and perfect for each other! She hoped she could find that someday.

But yeah, she was clueless about her heated (*make out?*) session with Mike.

The only thing she knew for sure was that she had liked it. Too much, if she was honest with herself.

And just like it happened to Mike, sleep eluded her that night.

When she got to school the next morning, she found a note in her locker. It was from Mike.

Hopper meet me at the AV Club room at 3:15. Please. Mike.

Something dropped on her stomach, almost choking her with a feeling of apprehension. She was afraid of facing Mike. Yes, he was the one who kissed her, but she had responded in kind. Quite enthusiastically on top of that.

El folded the note and headed to class. The minutes passed slowly that day, dragging on the dreadful anticipation she had been feeling since she found the note in the morning.

Finally, the bell rang, and she walked towards the AV room. The door was open, and Mike was already there, leaning against one of the desks curiously examining a Walkman. Hers, by the looks of it.

"Hmm, hi". She said, surprising him slightly.

Mike looked up and stood up quickly.

"Hi".

El remained quiet, just staring at him expectantly, making him feel uncomfortable. Nervous.

"You left your Walkman, yesterday". He told her, attempting to break the awkward silence.

"Thanks". She said softly as she took the proffered object from his hands, still looking at him with expectant intensity.

Right...I have to do the talking.

He was the one who had called her here after all.

"So, I wanted to apologize...about hmm, yesterday. It didn't mean...".

"Yes, I know this meant nothing Wheeler". She said coldly, cutting him off.

She felt something she couldn't name, something akin to disappointment, as she heard him say what she already knew.

Mike on the other hand, stared at her, mouth agape. Her tone surprised him, was she...angry?

He felt bad and tried to amend his previous words.

"I mean, it was...nice, but I didn't have any right to just kiss you like that. I'm sorry". He told her nervously, looking at some invisible dot on the door behind her.

El hated what he was saying, and she didn't know why. She only knew that the feeling of dreadful anticipation she had been having had just turned into sorrow.

A sorrow that suddenly turned into anger.

"I get it. Can't have a nice-looking girl near you, can you?" She said maliciously.

Mike's eyes widened in shock at her implication, conveying an expression of disbelief that she interpreted as him misunderstanding what she meant.

"You know, in such close quarters. I suppose it would be hard to control yourself, wouldn't it?". She clarified for his benefit.

El was trying to humiliate him, make him feel what she was feeling at this moment. And she succeeded because Mike's face turned red all of a sudden; indignation and disbelief marring his features.

"Excuse me?!" He shouted angrily, stepping towards her until they were face to face.

"I'm not some kind of creep! I'm trying to apologize because...because I..."

"Because what?!" She yelled back, holding his stare defiantly.

"Because I wanted to kiss you!" He exclaimed loudly. "So badly".

Their noses were almost touching, and his eyes lost their intensity for a moment as something in hers shifted. The shift emboldened him, and he placed his hands on her arms, keeping her looking straight at him.

"Because you looked lovely, sitting there, singing, reading...being you. The old you. For once not being a bitch". He concluded, speaking softly as if she were a scared animal that could run at any minute.

El kept staring at him dumbfounded by his confession. Warmth spread through her body and her hands, acting on their own accord, went to his cheeks, bringing their foreheads together; and making her abandon all her reservations.

"Mike..." She whispered. "Just...kiss me".

And he did.

4. Fascination Street

AN. Thanks for the comments! Hope you enjoy this chapter too :)

Chapter 4. Fascination Street

Hawkins High's AV Club room was a small space with a couple of desks and lots of electronic equipment that the only four members of the club used for...well, whatever it was the AV Club did. It's sort of unclear, the extent of what one does at said club...

Anyway, currently there were two people occupying the room, and curiously enough one of the occupants was not a member of the club. But that didn't seem to be a problem as they were both too busy kissing each other senseless to care about such technicalities.

"Mike..."

"Hmm..." He managed to moan without taking his lips off her neck. He was quite engaged sucking on her soft skin, definitely *not* trying to leave a mark.

"Mike!" She said more insistently, never mind the delicious feeling his tongue and teeth were creating on her.

"Whaaat..." He said dazedly, finally leaving her neck to look at her face.

They were a mess of tangled arms, blushes and heat. Both El's and Mike's hair was disheveled, his hands were on her hips, while hers were on his chest, touching his pectoral muscles with such abandon that it was causing him to have a hard time concentrating on anything but the feel of her hands on him. El was already sporting a hickey and Mike was suddenly feeling like his pants had become a straightjacket.

"We need to stop". She whispered breathily, clearly making an effort to be the voice of reason.

"Excuse me but you started it". He said half teasingly, half seriously.

His answer seemed to wake her up from her confused state and she took a step back, leaving the circle of his arms.

"What? No, you started it Wheeler! Does yesterday ring any bells?" She said defensively.

Mike rolled his eyes, getting slightly annoyed at her for interrupting one of the best make out sessions he had ever had. Not that he had kissed many girls in his life, but precisely based on that lack of, err... practice, he could tell this thing with El felt like nothing he had ever done before. Meaning that it felt awesome.

Even if he still didn't like her.

"Yes, well, evidently it was a colossal mistake on my part..." He retorted petulantly, crossing his arms on his chest and looking at her defiantly.

"Oh, shut up". She snapped.

"You shut up!" He countered, equally impertinent.

"Stop repeating everything I say!" She shouted frustratedly.

"I'm not, you are". He said coolly, smiling cheekily at the look of frustration on her face.

"God, why do you have to be so infuriating?!" She asked tiredly, almost rhetorically.

"Look who's talking!"

"Arggggh!" She groaned defeatedly and turned her face away from him.

Mike just looked at her and couldn't take it anymore. He took her chin gently and turned her head to look at him again. His eyes bore into hers seriously and El just stood there, transfixed by their color and the intensity they were showing.

"Are you always this obnoxious?" He whispered conspiratorially, smiling mischievously.

Her eyes widened in surprise and her stare went from being somewhat weary just minutes before, to being fully outraged by his question. She swatted his chest with the back of her hand and Mike caught it between both of his, seizing her distraction as an opportunity to kiss her again.

And El...well, she seemed to lose the ability to think straight every time Mike's lips touched hers. She gave into him completely, using her free hand to caress his cheek, while his hands freed hers to go around her back, pulling her closer to him.

El could feel Mike's body against her, all the hard planes of his chest pressed to her breasts, which surprisingly was hard and soft at the same time and not bony as she would have imagined with him being so tall and lanky. She felt magnificently, engulfed in his chest and cradled between his arms.

In the same way, Mike seemed fascinated by the softness of her lips, the smoothness of her skin and on how beautifully she fit against him, so small and delicate compared to his tall frame. The small moans she was emitting every time he deepened the kiss or moved his hands to caress her in a different place, were driving him crazy and wreaking havoc on his willpower.

Because these feelings were making him forget all about their rocky relationship, about everything he thought of her before and about the dreadful way she had been treating him during all these years. And he didn't seem to care. All he could think about right now was how much he wanted to keep kissing her for as long as it was humanly possible.

'Humanly possible' meant 'not much longer' it seemed, because as soon as the thought was formulated in his head, a knock and a shout rudely interrupted them.

"Hey Mike! You there?" Dustin's voice resonated through the closed door.

Mike and El broke apart, sporting similar looks of panic across their faces.

"Quick! Hide under the desk!" He whispered desperately. She nodded, rapidly grabbing her bag and dashing under the desk.

"Mike? Buddy, you there?"

"Yeah! Just a moment, I must have locked the door by accident". He said as he made sure El wasn't visible anymore.

He walked towards the door and opened it.

"Hey". He said walking in. "What were you doing here anyway?" Dustin asked curiously.

And given the fact that all of Mike's blood was currently located elsewhere, far away from his brain, he drew a blank and hesitated for too long while searching for a credible answer.

"I..."

Dustin, noticing his friend's discomfort and flushed state, very inelegantly guessed:

"Were you having dirty thoughts about Leia again?" He inquired, rather accusatorily.

A noise similar to a snort echoed through the room, Mike's eyes went wide, and he coughed trying to divert Dustin's attention from looking at the desk behind them.

"Errr sorry, I think I'm getting a cold". Mike said and coughed again to support his claim.

Dustin narrowed his eyes suspiciously, clearly not believing a word he was saying, but he let it go for the sake of their friendship and nodded.

"C'mon man we've talked about this; the AV room is sacred ground!" He said, continuing to scold Mike for his supposed transgression.

"I wasn't! I was just..." Giving up all hope at the look his friend was giving him, he relented.

"Fine! I won't do it ever again, I promise". He said defeatedly, face hot at having to concede to such a humiliating accusation. "Anyhow, what are *you* doing here?" He asked his curly haired friend.

"I forgot my algebra book the other day. Didn't you have to meet with the Ice Queen today?". Dustin said as he located the book in one of the desks. He grabbed it and put it inside his backpack.

"I did, but she couldn't make it, so we're rescheduling for tomorrow". He answered tensely.

"That sucks man. Is she giving you a *hard* time with the project?"

Mike swallowed audibly and discreetly adjusted his pants, hoping Dustin's wording had nothing to do with the current state of his private parts.

"You don't know the half of it".

"Hang in there, Mike, I'm sure everything will work out. If not, you can let Max loose on her or something". He said laughing lightly at his own joke.

Mike smiled too.

"I'll keep that in mind". He agreed, nodding his head affirmatively.

"Well, I'm off. See you tomorrow. And don't forget it Mike: no jerking off to Leia in the AV room!" He told him comically as he reached the door.

"Shut up Dustin!" Mike shouted after him, mortified by his friend's unfounded warning.

As soon as El heard the door closing she started to laugh unreservedly. Mike turned around to look at her scowling deeply.

"So, I was right: you do masturbate to Princess Leia". She said smugly, though her tone was more good-naturedly than mean.

But Mike didn't laugh. He just stared at her coldly, as if looking at her for the first time. Somehow, Dustin's presence had brought him back

to reality. Sure, he had wanted to apologize for kissing her the other day, but somewhere along the way he had lost perspective.

This was El *freaking* Hopper, the Ice Queen. She was not nice, specially not to him. Why did he keep kissing her? Why couldn't his hands stay away from her?

"C'mon Wheeler, don't pout like that, it doesn't become you". She said mockingly, taking his chin into her hand and coddling him like a five-year-old.

"Let go of my face". He said coldly and El recoiled as if she had been burned, all traces of humor gone from her face.

"What?" She asked surprised.

"Let go of my face. We hate each other remember? I don't want you touching me". He clarified, still emotionlessly.

She realized he was serious and felt a painful pang go through her.

I guess I deserve this.

"You weren't complaining five minutes ago, asshole". She retorted angrily but he didn't even flinch. He just stood there looking at her distantly, almost hatefully.

"But you're right. This was a mistake". She finished with as much dignity as she could muster. "What about this stupid project?"

"We can meet here again tomorrow, bring the books you were consulting at the library and we can work from there". He said in a business-like manner, detachedly.

"Fine by me". She said coldly and left, slamming the door loudly on her way out.

Mike let out a sigh of relief or frustration, he still wasn't sure which.

The next day Mike was still preoccupied by what had transpired between El and him.

Their close encounter with Dustin had dropped a bucket of freezing water on his head reminding him of the reality of their situation. That illusion induced by her kisses wasn't El Hopper, he had been blinded by his hormones and her gorgeous face, he had forgotten the Ice Queen during some of those precious, heavenly minutes they spent kissing and touching each other.

But Mike knew he couldn't let himself fall into her claws again. For all he knew she was doing this on purpose to mess with his head and ridicule him in front of her stupid friends or something equally sinister. No matter how good she felt in his arms or how right it felt to kiss her all the time. This relationship was toxic and had the potential to explode in his face.

He decided not to tell his friends about his lapse in judgement. He was sure it wasn't going to happen again anyway, and there was no need to worry them over something as trivial as this.

However, his unease was noticed by them during lunch that day.

"What's up Wheeler? You look more miserable than usual". Max remarked as she took a seat in front of him.

"Yeah man, you look a bit under the weather". Lucas agreed casually, joining Max on her bench.

"Not much really, I didn't sleep very well last night". He lied.

"Is Hopper keeping you up at night?" Dustin asked curiously, as he munched on his fries.

At this, Mike almost choked on his water, spilling a bit around the lunch tray in front of him.

"What?!"

"You know, because of your project. You said she was giving you a hard time".

"Oh. Oh, yeah, that's a bit of it, yeah...I'm a bit worried because we are still behind on the bases of the project". He responded, slightly flushed and relieved that he had misinterpreted the meaning of

Dustin's words.

Will, being the positive, reasonable, soul he was, suggested:

"Maybe you should just have an honest talk with her and see where you guys want to take this essay. You know like establish short term goals or something like that".

Mike appreciated his friends' concern, but he wasn't really in the mood to discuss his complicated relationship with El, so he nodded and tried to reassure them.

"Thanks guys, but don't worry I'm fine".

They all nodded and kept eating their food, already moving on to the next topic of conversation.

Mike fidgeted for a bit with his lunch but eventually forced himself to eat. It wouldn't do him any good to spend the afternoon hungry and annoyed, specially knowing that he would have to face El.

Across the other side of the cafeteria, El was also fidgeting with her food. More specifically, she was alternating between playing with her mashed potatoes and furtively looking at Mike with contempt.

El couldn't help but feel angry with him. She felt humiliated and used. Maybe she was exaggerating, maybe Mike was just like every boy she knew; maybe she deserved everything she got. No, not maybe. She was sure she deserved Mike's scorn.

She sighed miserably.

When he had told her why he had kissed her, she had melted. She had felt...something. Something that she still couldn't name, and the long-lost hope that maybe she could amend what she had done. He had sounded sincere and for a moment she had thought that maybe he had forgiven her, or at least that she would get a real chance to apologize to him and seek his forgiveness.

That hope went out the drain the minute she saw the coldness in his eyes.

Why would he want anything to do with me?

Maybe he was getting revenge for everything she had done to him. She wanted to believe that was the case, but she knew Mike was a good person, he was not like her. He probably realized just who he was kissing and reconsidered, seeing the error of his ways.

She had let her guard down, they both had. It had felt good and they had succumbed to their most basic impulses. But there was nothing between them. They were nothing more than classmates. What made her think that anything could change?

Did she even want *something* to change?

Yes.

Mike's resolve to never touch or kiss El lasted for about 24 hours.

He was already in the room when she knocked on the door that afternoon.

"Come in, it's open". He responded, slightly nervous, already struggling to maintain his determination of being as detached as possible.

El opened the door and came in. She was wearing a lovely blue sundress that was immediately threatening the foundations of Mike's willpower.

"I brought the books, I think these three are the most important, at least at this stage of the project". She said, interrupting his thoughts.

He noticed her cold stance and business-like tone and understood that she was also determined to get this over quickly. He supposed it was only to be expected after the way he treated her yesterday.

"Ok, so we should get to work". He said trying to sound firm.

She nodded, giving him one of the books and sitting at the farthest desk from him she could find.

The room was undeniably filled with tension. The minutes slowly went by and not a sound could be heard as they worked carefully, browsing through the books and taking notes of possible facts they could use for their essay.

From time to time Mike would glance at her secretively, but she didn't notice, completely focused on her task. She seemed to be making an extra effort to ignore his presence in the room. And he couldn't help but feel disappointed. He wanted her to look at him, to be as uncomfortable as he was at the thought of having her so near, yet so far away.

Mike seriously didn't know what was happening to him. Yesterday he had pushed her away and today he felt miserable at the distance between them. A distance he had created. He had convinced himself that wanting her was wrong, but today he couldn't find a single argument against his desire.

Suddenly El stood up and started packing her things.

"I'm done with my part, I'll copy the notes for you and bring them tomorrow, so we have the same information". She wasn't looking at him as she talked, keeping herself absorbed on packing her stuff.

Mike watched her closely, taking in her form, how lovely she looked and the determined look she had on her face. She seemed to be doing a better job at ignoring him than Mike at ignoring her. And not really knowing how or when, he suddenly found himself in front of her.

Startled by his sudden presence so close to her, she took a step back, hitting the wall softly. Looking at his eyes, El noticed the same intensity she had observed yesterday, the same passion. And she panicked.

"El..." He whispered trying to reach for one of her hands, but she didn't let him, moving it away from him.

"No. You don't get to do this to me anymore". She said firmly, almost pleadingly, placing her hands on his chest with intention of shoving him away from her.

But Mike caught her hands between his and pulled her closer instead.

"I'm sorry". He said sincerely, looking down into her eyes. "For being harsh...yesterday".

El could only look at him incredulously, surprised by his changing demeanor. Once again, he caught her off guard. She nodded silently, and he gave her a small smile. So contagious was his smile that she couldn't help herself, her lips responded with a barely perceptive one of her own.

And of course, he kissed her again. Passionately, deeply, making her head hum and her heart leap dangerously in her chest. She couldn't feel anything but him pressed up deliciously against her, hands on her cheeks and chest firmly anchoring her against the wall.

After what seemed like minutes, they slowly pulled away, both still caught in the stupor of the kiss.

"This can't keep happening Mike". She whispered breathlessly, their foreheads touching snugly.

"I know". He agreed, still caressing her cheeks softly.

But then he kissed her once more and she gave in, losing herself in the feel of him as he mercilessly invaded her senses.

There was an unspoken truce between Mike and El after that second day they met in the AV Club room. Though three weeks had passed since then and it kept happening: they kept ending up in each other's arms, kissing madly.

At some point they just stopped questioning the reasons why they went back to each other each day and began to feel, letting go of their worries and surrendering themselves to their most passionate impulses.

They had been meeting each other almost every day at the AV room during lunch to make out and two times a week in Mike's basement to continue their history project. Surprisingly the project was going well, they managed to work on it thoroughly and efficiently, leaving

more than enough time to enjoy their other, more pleasurable, exploits.

Of course, none of El's friends –or Mike's– knew what was happening between them. Hell, not even Mike and El knew what was happening between them. They just...kept gravitating towards each other like magnets, offering no resistance.

On her part, El wanted to keep this thing they had, whatever it was, just between them. She didn't want people talking about them or creating stupid rumors. She liked having Mike all to herself.

Perversely though, the voice of her conscience reminded her that some tiny bit of her was also afraid of what her popular friends would say if they knew she was having a 'thing' with someone like Mike. She would never hear the end of it. And her popularity would definitely go downhill. Curiously enough, the prospect of losing all that didn't seem to scare her as she once thought it would.

"So, are your friends asking questions as well?" Mike asked curiously, looking up from his notebook at her, seated comfortably in his place on the basement's couch. El was seated at the other end of the couch with a book on her lap.

"What do you mean?" She said, clearly caught off guard by his question.

"Oh, you know, things like: dude what's happening with you? We barely see you at lunch...Or why do you spend so much time working in that project with Hopper?"

El's eyes widened.

"Do you think they're getting suspicious?" She asked, slightly panicked.

Mike noticed this and frowned. He was on the verge of becoming very irritated, he knew what that look meant.

"I doubt it. The thought of us being anything other than hateful to each other is highly unlikely. They wouldn't suspect a thing". He said, trying to think logically about them.

But El wasn't appeased by his intended reassurance.

"Swear to me you won't say anything Wheeler!" She pleaded heatedly.

There it is. Of course she wouldn't want to go public about us.

But what is 'us' anyway?

So far, this conversation hadn't even crossed their minds. Up to this point they had been avoiding thinking about the nature of their *pseudo* relationship. Still, her reaction bothered Mike.

"Oh sure, we wouldn't want your precious reputation to be ruined by everyone finding out you make out with the school's biggest nerd, now would we?" He asked sardonically, and she rolled her eyes but remained quiet.

"What about my reputation huh? Of course, I won't tell anyone about this, I don't want them to know I shove my tongue down the Ice Queen's throat on regular basis!" He told her, practically shouting.

She narrowed her eyes angrily.

"Oh, Really? Well then maybe we shouldn't do it anymore". She declared contemptuously.

"Fine!" He shouted angrily.

"Fine!" She shouted, echoing his sentiment.

But before they knew it, both of them launched at each other and started kissing hungrily. At some point during their argument they had stood up from the couch and were near one of the basement's walls...now making out heavily.

"Can't keep...your hands...to yourself...can you, Hopper?" Mike asked between kisses.

"I hate you Wheeler". She managed to answer as she grasped for air and brought his lips back to hers, desperately pulling him closer.

Her hands were wildly running through his hair and neck, going

down to his back and sensuously grazing his buttocks. Mike groaned into her mouth and deepened the kiss, first biting her lower lip softly and then sucking on her tongue. His hands got a mind of their own and grabbed her bottom, pulling her flush against his crotch.

It was El's turn to moan, the sensation suddenly making her feel hot and bothered. For a moment she felt a certain kind of panic rising within her. Fear about what this boy was making her feel. Deciding to ignore her traitorous thoughts, she pushed them into the back of her brain and proceeded to embrace the unexpected hotness that was Mike Wheeler.

After a few minutes of heavy kisses and dangerous wandering hands, El felt Mike's erection sharply poking her stomach. Surprised, she slowed the rhythm of her attack, opting for unhurried kisses and avoiding rubbing herself against him with her previous abandon. They had to stop. At least for now. This fling or whatever it was, it was getting out of hand.

Slowly and with one last, lingering kiss, El pulled away from Mike.

"I have to go". She whispered softly, as their foreheads touched, each still recovering from the dizziness caused by their encounter.

Like waking up from a sweet dream, reality hit them like a blow.

El recovered first, and her iciness took over once more.

"Oops...you seem to have a...*not so* very small problem...I'll leave you two alone then". She remarked mockingly as she looked down at the front of his pants. She smirked and backed away from him slowly.

"Same time, same place tomorrow?" She asked nonchalantly.

He nodded numbly, and she exited the basement. Mike sighed, leaning back into the wall and looking down at the protruding bulge in his pants.

She was going to be the death of him.

5. Stacey's Party

AN. Thanks for the lovely comments, follows, favorites and kudos! Hope you enjoy this chapter too, it's a bit longer than the others :)

Chapter 5. Stacey's Party

On that particular Monday afternoon El didn't want to be at the gym, captaining the cheerleading practice or listening to her friends trying to cheer Tammy up. She would much rather be in Mike's basement, kissing the hell out of him in that comfy couch of his and bickering non-stop about how much of a nerd he is.

She smiled inwardly at the thought.

Instead, here she was, slightly out of her mind with want, thinking about his hands and his lips on her body, while trapped in the gym at four in the afternoon, pretending to care about Tammy's break up with Brad. She sighed disappointedly.

It's not that she didn't care about her friend's woes, she did; she really did. But these days her brain couldn't help but be focused on her own feelings of...what exactly did she feel lately? Was it happiness? Contentment? Peace? Or was it just the physical pleasure that her make out sessions with Mike brought her? She was still trying to figure it out, but something was plain clear to her: Mike was all she could think about lately.

"El?" Stacey's voice called. But El was still in her own little world.

"El, are you listening?" She tried again and this time El turned her face to look at her.

"Huh?"

"What's up with you lately? You seem to be far away all the time, and not only metaphorically, you keep disappearing at lunch almost every day!"

"I...I'm sorry. It's just this stupid project with Wheeler, we are a bit

behind and sometimes I use my lunch break to catch up on my research". She explained, trying to sound frustrated.

"Ughh, I don't know how you deal with that. You should have just let him do all the work, you're too good Ellie". Jennifer said, and Stacey rolled her eyes discreetly.

Yes, El was one of her best friends, but there was no need to kiss her ass on daily basis like some of the other cheerleaders seemed to think.

"Anyway, we were saying that it would be cool to have a party this Saturday at my place. My parents are out of town and Tammy could use some cheering up". Stacey explained to El.

"Sounds cool, count me in". El said simply.

"Yes! I knew you would be on board. I'm going to invite *everyone*, I want this party to be awesome!" Stacey exclaimed excitedly.

"What do you mean everyone? You're not thinking about inviting Brad, are you?" Asked a teary-eyed Tammy.

"No silly, I mean like people outside of our circle".

El snorted incredulously.

"Even the nerds?" She asked skeptically.

"Especially the nerds dear Ellie. Haven't you heard? 'Geek is the new chic'". Stacey told her maliciously and El couldn't help but feel as if her friend was doing this on purpose, just to annoy her.

"I bet Wheeler would love to hang out with you outside of your project". Sneered Jennifer and the others laughed.

"Shut up, Jen". El told her, getting slightly irritated at her squad. She didn't like where this conversation was going.

"Why do you hate him so much anyway? Didn't you guys used to be friends or something?" Stacey asked her, more due to curiosity than to wickedness.

El seemed surprised by the question.

"Me? Friends with that nerd? As if!" She answered trying to sound nonchalant.

"I could have sworn..." Stacey continued, but was cut off by El quickly.

"No. You are mistaken. In fact, I don't even know why you want to invite them".

"I want this to be the party of the year, everyone should be there". Stacey explained simply.

"Whatever, it's your party". She huffed, pretending to be annoyed.

Truth was, El couldn't care less if Stacey invited Mike and his friends. In fact, she was already thinking about sneaking around with him somewhere at Stacey's house to kiss him senseless.

She had to admit she sort of liked this whole 'secretive' aspect of their relationship.

By Tuesday afternoon everyone in Hawkins High had already heard about Stacey's party next Saturday. In fact, it was the only thing everyone was talking about, even Mike and his friends.

"We are definitely going". Said Dustin from his place on the couch at Mike's basement.

"Why?" Max asked, sounding almost offended by Dustin's suggestion.

"The question is: 'Why not?'" He retorted as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Eeerrrr...because it's lame?" Max answered sarcastically.

"It's totally not lame, Maxine". Dustin countered in a calm voice and Max exploded, as he knew she would when he called her Maxine.

"Call me that one more time and I will make a hat out of my

skateboard for you Henderson".

"Uh-uhh I'm shaking!" He mocked, unwisely.

"That's it! Stalker hold my book". She said, standing up so quickly she almost knocked over the coffee table in front of the couch.

"Max!" Lucas admonished, taking her arm and pulling her down towards him to sit again in the sofa they had been sharing.

"Cut it out guys". Mike admonished tiredly. This seemed to work because both of them went quiet and stayed seated on their respective places.

"What's wrong with you anyway?" Max asked, seemingly having forgotten about her spat with Dustin.

"What? Nothing, everything is fine. Really". Mike said, trying to sound convincing.

"Hmm, you seem too distracted lately Mike, are you sure everything is ok?" Will asked concernedly.

"And where have you been going during lunch break man? Food time is sacred!" Dustin added indignantly.

Mike thought about what to say for a few seconds and luckily something came to him.

"Ah...hmm...well, this is sort of embarrassing but...well, I'm working on a story". He explained a bit sheepishly.

His friends knew that he had always had a knack for telling stories, so it didn't come as a surprise that he wanted to pursue that talent more seriously.

"That's not embarrassing, that's pretty awesome Mike!" Will said, smiling encouragingly.

"Yeah dude, that's cool!" Lucas agreed, patting him on the back excitedly.

"You could have told us Wheeler". Max said rolling her eyes at her friend's foolishness at believing the would mock him for writing.

"Yeah man, better than us thinking you were off making out with Hopper or something". Dustin said grinning cheekily.

Mike suddenly went pale.

"WHAT?" He all but shouted.

Dustin burst out laughing, the others watching amusedly.

"Chill out. Just a harmless joke. I know you would never touch her, not even if your life depended on it". He said sounding pretty reassured and Mike felt relieved, his blood back in his body.

Meanwhile, Max was looking at him distrustfully.

"Really, Wheeler? The thought has *never* crossed your mind? I mean, she is really pretty". Max asked coolly, though she had a suspicious air about her that Mike couldn't ignore.

Do they know about us? He thought panicked.

"Don't be absurd Max, she's not my type. I don't like cruel girls like her". Mike answered as indifferently as he could manage. Max nodded.

"Hey, just checking". She said, raising her hands in surrender, but Mike could see it in her eyes that she still wasn't convinced.

"So, Stacey's party! What do we do? Should we vote?"

Everyone rolled their eyes at Dustin's eagerness.

"I think it could be fun". Mike said casually, shrugging his shoulders.

"Hmm well, we've never been to a high school party...so..." Will agreed cautiously.

Max understood then that she had been beaten.

"Fine, we'll go to Stacey's stupid party. Even if she's just throwing it to

distract Tammy from her break up with Brad". She accepted defeatedly.

"What?" Mike asked surprised, as every alarm went off in his head.

"Yeah, you didn't know? Brad broke up with Tammy over the weekend. Apparently, 'she's devastated'". Max recounted, making quotation marks with her hands.

"I bet Hopper it's going to make a move on him now". Lucas added surely.

"You think?" Mike asked, almost involuntarily. And he prayed his voice didn't sound as panicked as he thought it sounded in his head.

"Oh, I'm sure she will. She's been wanting a piece of him for a while now". Max answered ruthlessly, carefully watching out for Mike's reaction.

She definitely was on to him.

"Huh, you're right. It's only a matter of time". He agreed trying to sound convincingly detached.

But what if El does hook up with Brad? Where does that leave me? Us?

Not surprisingly, his thoughts revolved around the same subject throughout the remainder of the afternoon.

Wednesday found Mike and El lounging on his basement after school. They were quietly working on their history project, very much focused on each other's tasks. Though El seemed to be more concentrated on the book she was researching than Mike.

The wheels in his head kept turning, tirelessly thinking about El and her –surely official by now– romance with Brad. He felt a burning sensation in his chest that made it impossible to concentrate, and his efforts to suppress his desperate need to ask her about it were crumbling by leaps and bounds.

Instead, he decided to bring up their 'adventures' at the AV room;

more precisely, to bring up the fact that Max was becoming suspicious about them.

"I had an interesting chat yesterday". He stated casually.

"Hmm..." She hummed noncommittally.

"Hmm, yeah. My friends asked me about what I do when I skip lunch. I managed to dodge the bullet, but I think Max is getting suspicious". He explained sheepishly.

"Maybe we should stop then". She said, though he could tell that she was teasing him.

"Or maybe we could just meet at another time? Another place?" He retorted, trying to sound cool but actually sounding way too eager for his taste.

"That could work too". She answered, this time looking up from her book and giving him a lopsided grin.

Mike blushed slightly and grinned back at her before she returned to her book. He couldn't help but feel warm by their exchange and decided to take the plunge and bring up what had really been worrying him since yesterday.

"So, hmm, Stacey's party...are you going?" He asked, casually browsing through his book.

She nodded evasively, not looking up from her book. Mike felt his irritation rising at her dismissive gesture. Sometimes he felt that his rapport with El was definitely an emotional rollercoaster.

"And...are you bringing someone? Actually, now that we are talking about this, are you seeing someone like, for real? 'Cause you see, I've heard this rumor that..."

"I don't think that's any of your business". She said flatly, not even looking up at him.

Mike grimaced and put his book down.

"Well, good to know some things never change". He observed bitterly.

"Not in the mood Wheeler". She responded, still indifferent to his tone.

His patience, though, finally came to an end.

"What happened to you? You used to be nice. We used to be friends". He asked, unabashedly showing his frustration.

She sighed jadedly.

"I grew up Mike, simple as that".

But he didn't buy her flimsy excuse, so he pushed.

"Bullshit. You can't just change the way you did and start treating people like shit, especially people that were supposedly your friends".

This time she did look up from her book. She was surprised by his insistence on the matter. So far, they had avoided talking about their past friendship or about anything personal going on their lives, always forsaking the talking in favor of their heated make out sessions.

She ignored him once more and he pushed again, this time too far.

"Is it because your mother died?"

Mike realized his mistake the minute the words left his mouth.

Her eyes widened in alarm and slowly started to fill with tears. She looked as if she had been physically struck. Shakily standing up, she silently fumbled with her backpack and her books, and hurriedly made it to the basement's door.

Mike was frozen as he saw her stand up and gather her things, suddenly ashamed of himself for bringing up her mother's death. He snapped out of his haze as she reached for the door's handle.

"Wait...El! Please wait". He shouted, but to no avail.

El was far gone.

"I'm sorry..." He whispered to the empty basement.

Meanwhile at the Hoppers' household, El had made it home a couple of hours ago and was now slumped in her bed; thinking about Mike and their complicated relationship. She thought back to when everything started, and a sense of sadness suddenly invaded her.

When El was ten years old her mother was diagnosed with cancer. She and her family moved to Indianapolis to be closer to better medical care.

Her mom died two years later.

As it was to be expected, El was devastated. She went numb, quickly becoming a shadow of the happy girl she used to be.

But her mother's death didn't turn El into the person she was today.

No. She did that herself.

When her mother died, she lost faith in everything and anything. So, she stopped caring. The only exception was her dad. She could never stop caring for Hopper, not when he was the only family she had left and the best dad one could ever ask for. Everyone else was fair game.

At thirteen, her school counselor recommended for her to try some extracurricular activity, to help her cope with the trauma of losing her mother. Hopper suggested she tried out for the cheerleading squad.

Not really caring much about her counselor's suggestion, she tried it anyway. It turned out she had an innate gift for cheerleading and soon was taken in by the squad; with everything that came with it: acceptance, recognition but mainly, with popularity.

At first it didn't make a difference to her, she just focused on her grades and her training. But as time passed, her wounds hurt less, the weight of her mother's death became lighter and El became more like them: vain, arrogant, selfish, conceited...the list could go on.

By the time her father decided they should return to Hawkins, her friendship with Mike was a distant memory that only came back when she saw him again at Hawkins High. He caught her off guard, approaching her as she was being introduced to her new cheerleading squad. She had been surprised to see him, to see how much he had grown and how handsome he had become.

But when she saw the look of disdain with which his interruption was received in most of the faces surrounding her, she quickly picked up that Mike wasn't very well liked by the popular crowd. *Her* crowd now. And so, she followed them blindly.

She didn't have it in her to care for Mike Wheeler, nor did he deserve her as a friend. Not like that, not as this new person she had become. And just like that, she let go of any expectations she might have had of recovering his friendship.

It wasn't his fault that bringing up her mother's death still affected her. She knew she had acted impulsively by leaving the basement in a rush, but she didn't want him to see her like that. Weak, scared... human. Even if she was all those things.

She sighed and turned on her back to stare at the ceiling.

What am I going to do with you Mike Wheeler?

The next day in school Mike's morning dragged on forever as he waited nervously until he would see El in one of their usual secret meetings, so he could apologize. He hadn't been able to sleep last night, tossing and turning continuously, thinking about what had transpired between them yesterday afternoon. He had even wanted to call her, but he was too much of a coward to do it.

Besides, it's not like she gave me her phone number, he thought, rolling his eyes.

Unfortunately for Mike, he didn't have any luck that morning. He didn't see her anywhere around school and when lunch time came he waited and waited for her at the AV room, but she didn't show. He was really worried now.

They were supposed to meet today at 4pm in his basement for their second meeting of the week to work on their project, so he was hoping that she might still show up. If not, he would go to her house to apologize if he had to.

At 4pm, Mike was already waiting nervously in the basement with a plate of warm *Eggos* and maple syrup. He remembered how El used to love the waffles when she was little, and he hoped she still liked them and would receive them as a peace offering.

The sound of knocking interrupted his thoughts and the door suddenly opened to let El in. She looked fragile and modest, a look he hadn't seen on her in years.

"Hi". She said in a small voice, oddly shy.

"Hi El!" He greeted nervously in a high-pitched tone. "Hmm...I brought you *Eggos*!"

She stared at him with a strange look in her eyes. He seemed to realize the absurdity of his gesture and quickly explained.

"These are a peace offering...to apologize, for yesterday. I'm sorry El". He said sincerely, offering the plate to her.

El looked down from his eyes to the proffered plate and then back up to his face. Her face blank and cautious, until she smiled softly; almost gratefully, and took the plate from him.

"Thanks". She said simply.

And Mike thought that her smile felt like the first sincere smile he had gotten from her in a long time. Yesterday's lovely one notwithstanding.

Maybe the ice finally has started to melt.

They sat on the couch and El offered him a waffle, which he took gladly, thanking her with a smile. They ate silently as they took out their books and notebooks from their backpacks and prepared the table for their work session.

Mike and El worked for about two hours quietly, though not uncomfortably so. Neither of them mentioning the events of the day before.

"What time is it?" El asked him as she stretched her legs and yawned tiredly.

"Barely 6pm". He answered after checking his watch.

"I have to leave early today". She told him and started to pick up her things.

"Oh. Ok". He said simply, sounding a bit disappointed.

He stood up as well, intending to walk her to the door and see her out. Just as they reached the door El turned to look at him, approaching him slowly until she was right in front of him.

"Will you kiss me before I leave Mike?" She asked, her big doe eyes looking at him anxiously.

Mike didn't have it him to deny her, so he kissed her. Sweetly, unhurriedly, almost lovingly.

And for the first time since this thing between them started, Mike felt the palpable absence of anger in their kiss. This was a kiss given without frustration, without lust and unruly by their teenage hormones. This kiss felt completely different, as if it had somehow changed the dynamic of their relationship.

They broke apart slowly, still savoring the softness of the kiss, and looked at each other intently, resting their foreheads together. Still smiling, they pulled apart. El turned to open the door, but just before opening it she seemed to remember something and turned back to Mike.

"Oh, and about Stacey's party? I'll be going alone. Will you look for me? Please?"

He nodded, smiling dopily at her. She smiled back and finally exited the basement, leaving an awestruck Mike staring dazedly after her.

Saturday couldn't come soon enough.

The night of the party finally arrived, and Mike was running late. He had to babysit his little sister Holly that afternoon while his parents were away in Indianapolis. They got home late due to traffic and Mike had to wait until almost nine to leave for the party.

When he got there, he saw his friends drinking and lounging comfortably in the living room of Stacey's house. As he approached them, he couldn't help but look around slyly, trying to locate El among the crowd of teenagers.

"Hey man, you made it!" Lucas exclaimed as he saw Mike come in through the door.

"Hey guys, sorry I'm late". He said, taking a seat on one of the available chairs near the coffee table.

"Dude you missed THE event of the night!" Dustin shouted excitedly, and the others groaned at his enthusiasm. Mike noticed that Will looked a bit worried and, much like him, seemed to be looking for someone at the party.

"Why? What happened?" He asked, looking at them curiously. Max decided to step in and narrate what occurred just before he arrived.

"Well, apparently Hopper made a move on Brad just mere days after he broke up with Tammy. Tammy saw them making out and confronted her here, accusing her of being a conniving, envious bitch".

Mike couldn't believe his ears.

"Tammy almost hit Hopper, but Stacey intervened and prevented her from doing so. It was a riot dude." Dustin finished.

"What...what happened to Hopper?" Mike asked nervously, trying to suppress the feeling of foreboding that assaulted him at the mention of El and Brad making out.

"She didn't take it so well and started drinking her ass off. She's

probably around here somewhere". Max told him, shrugging uninterestedly.

"I'm going to check on her, she shouldn't be drinking so much". Will said worriedly.

"Why?" Max asked him sharply.

"Just because, Max". Will told her firmly, clearly without any desire to explain himself to his redheaded friend, and took off without a word in search of El.

"I...I'm going to get a drink". Mike said and hurriedly left the living room.

Praying that he wouldn't run into Will as he also searched for El, Mike quickly climbed up the stairs. He didn't like what Max had said about her and Brad, but he wasn't about to let her drink and do something stupid; or worse, leave her to be taken advantage of by someone like Troy and his friends.

After making it to the second floor, he navigated through the hallways of Stacey's house amid drunken people, couples making out and people just drinking calmly; urgently looking for El.

After going through many of the rooms, he finally found her at Stacey's room. She was seated sloppily against the headboard, a half empty bottle of something in her hand and a look of utter sadness and defeat on her face.

He closed the door softly and she seemed to finally notice him.

"Mike". She said quietly, her eyes downcast.

"El, are you ok?" He asked her, making his way to seat in front of her on the bed.

"No".

"What happened?"

"Tammy thinks I hooked up with Brad, but I didn't! I swear, I didn't

Mike!".

"Shhh...I believe you El". And he did. His logic told him that if El had really done what Tammy said, she would have owned it like the alpha female she was and not be here, drunkenly having a break down.

"You...you do?" She asked disbelievingly. And he nodded comfortingly.

El put her bottle down and in a flash was straddling Mike, kissing him fully on the mouth and hugging him tightly to her. He let himself enjoy the sensation of El in his arms, until he noticed that she had started grinding her pelvis suggestively against his.

He froze, but she didn't seem to notice and brought her hands to the collar of his buttoned shirt, fumbling with the buttons as she tried to take it off him. He brought his hands to hers and stopped her, breaking the kiss in the process.

"El...what are you doing?"

"What does it look like?" She asked teasingly, trying to continue the task of unbuttoning his shirt. He stopped her once more, grabbing her hands and placing them safely between their bodies.

"I'm not going to take advantage of you like this El". He told her seriously, looking intently into her eyes, trying to make her see his sincere determination.

"But I want you to take advantage of me Mike". She half whined pitifully, loosening her hands and bringing them again to his shirt.

"El...no...please get off..." He said desperately.

"Mike, yes! I want you to be my first". She pleaded, caressing his cheeks and his chest maddeningly, making him lose his willpower momentarily.

"Wha...what?!" He asked, barely registering what she was saying.

"I do. I want you so much right now. Help me forget, Mike. Make me

forget please". She begged.

Mike was having a hard time concentrating on saying 'no' to El, but he would be damned if he hurt her by taking advantage of her.

"No, El...tonight is not the night. You...you're drunk. It wouldn't be right". He pleaded with her, trying to make her see that this was a terrible idea. Not like this.

"Don't you want me?" She asked him innocently, wide eyes looking sadly at him.

"Oh god, yes. I do! You don't know how much I want you...but it can't happen like this". Mike told her firmly, almost as desperate as she was, but to make her understand that there was nothing in the world he wanted more than to have sex with her.

"Ok. I believe you Mike". She said in a small voice and Mike felt relieved.

"Here, drink this El, it will make you feel better". He offered her a bottle of water he had brought with him. She took it and drank eagerly, no doubt thirsty after ingesting so much pure alcohol.

When he was satisfied that she had drunk enough, he took the bottle gently from her. El kept looking at him with that sad, scared look and he couldn't help but feel bad for her. Taking her face in his hands, he caressed her cheeks gently and bent down to kiss her sweetly...only to be suddenly interrupted by the door opening loudly.

"Mike!"

"AHHHHH!" They both shouted in fright at the unexpected disruption. They scrambled away from each other, Mike standing up quickly and El remaining on the bed, too dizzy to stand.

"She's drunk! Why are you kissing her?" Will shouted angrily, for a second believing the worst of his friend.

"Will! This is not what it looks like! Please let me explain!" Mike said rapidly, in desperation.

"He is right Will. He's not taking advantage of me. I'm fine, still drunk, but fine".

El's voice made Will take his eyes off from Mike for a second and he nodded, turning back to him expectantly.

"Ok. Explain".

"We...we've been..." Mike tried to explain, but his nervousness interfered.

"You've been sneaking around, haven't you?" He asked gently.

"Hmm, ah...yes. To put it simply". Mike awkwardly agreed.

"Since when?"

"Since we started working on our history project". El answered softly.

"Huh. That actually explains a lot..." Will conceded.

"Will, you...you have to promise not to say anything. Please". El pleaded with him and Mike frowned slightly.

He didn't want to hide anymore. For a second he thought that Will finding out might finally be what they needed to end the secrecy of their relationship. Apparently not.

"Ok El, I will keep your secret".

"Mike, you should go back to your friends, they will be wondering where you are". Suggested El.

"I won't leave you here alone and drunk". He said stubbornly.

"Don't worry Mike, I can stay with El until she's sober enough. Then I can take you home if you want?" Will proposed kindly.

She nodded, a grateful look on her face.

"Thank you Will".

"Don't mention it". He said, smiling at her gently.

"Ok...so...I'm off then". Mike said awkwardly. "Thanks Will". He added, and Will nodded.

He turned to look at El and bent down to kiss her forehead softly.

"Get better, Hopper". He told her affectionally.

She looked up at him and smiled softly.

"I will".

Mike nodded and finally left the room.

6. Of talks and realizations

AN. Thanks for reading, I enjoy your feedback immensely :) This chapter was going to be slightly longer but, in the end, it just seemed right to finish it there.

Chapter 6. Of talks and realizations

The party at Stacey's house was still in full bloom when Will and El made their way downstairs. El's friends were nowhere to be seen and she was glad for it, she didn't want to deal with that right now. Will's friends, including Mike, were still lounging in the living room.

"I'm just going to say goodbye and we can be on our way". Will told her as they reached the bottom of the stairs. El nodded and waited there, trying not to look at Mike and ignoring the stares several people were giving her, no doubt still curious about the fight between her and Tammy.

"So, I'm walking El home, I'll see you guys on Monday".

"She screws up and you have to clean up after her?" Max asked Will indignantly, her fiery red highlighting the angry look on her face.

"Max, babe..." Lucas said warningly, not wanting to see another conflict unfold tonight.

"Yes, 'babe' please don't". Dustin said, unconsciously mocking them, but just like Lucas, trying to prevent another spat.

Meanwhile Mike just stared at El longingly. It was a good thing Max was busy scowling at his friends because if she had been paying attention to Mike, she probably would have known that something was up with him.

"Whatever". She huffed and crossed her arms over chest petulantly. Will just rolled his eyes and walked back to El.

"We can go now El". He said quietly as he reached her. El nodded and started walking towards the door, but not before throwing a veiled

glance in Mike's direction.

The cool air of the night greeted them as they started the walk through Stacey's neighborhood and towards El's home.

"Are you ok El?"

Will's question brought her back from her thoughts. She shrugged her shoulders quietly, not looking up from the floor.

"Want to talk about it?"

"Not really, but it may be good if I do". She said resignedly. Will nodded understandingly, giving her time to gather her thoughts and tell him what happened.

"The thing with Brad...I didn't make out with him". She stated shakily, as if she thought that Will wouldn't believe her. But Will gave her a gentle, sincere look, encouraging her to continue.

"Yesterday, after cheerleading practice, I ran into him. He was pretty down from what happened with Tammy, I guess he needed a shoulder to cry on or something. The cliché thing happened and apparently Tammy saw us while we hugged, but she decided to wait until the party to make a scene". She recounted bitterly.

"And who spread the rumor about you and him?"

"I don't really know, it was probably herself misreading the whole situation and overreacting".

"Aren't you guys supposed to be good friends? I mean all of you?" He asked, slightly puzzled about her friends' behavior.

She sighed and nodded.

"We are. Or at least I thought we were. Guess I was wrong". She concluded bitterly.

"They shouldn't have jumped to conclusions". He added trying to be supportive.

"It doesn't matter anyway, it's all fake when you're popular isn't it?"

"It's that why you are with Mike?" His question surprised her, and she hesitated before responding.

"It's...complicated".

"Is it really? Mike is one of the less complicated people I know". He asked inquisitively.

"You're not going to make this easy on me, are you?" She asked ironically, and Will just shrugged, giving her an apologetic smile.

"We are not together, we just make out. A lot". She clarified.

"But would you like to be with him? In a more permanent, conventional, public way?"

"I...I don't know". She said, vacillating slightly. "I like him a lot, but I don't think it would be good if we went public".

"Good for whom? You or him?"

"God! Aren't you the devil's advocate tonight" She exclaimed half annoyed at Will's perceptive nature.

"I'm sorry El. I'm just trying to understand. If you enjoy spending time with him and you both obviously have chemistry, then what's the problem?" He reasoned. But then it hit him.

"Are you afraid of your friends' reaction if you were to go public with him?"

She didn't look at Will, opting to stare fixatedly at the floor instead as she walked. Her silence confirmed his suspicions.

"They are my friends Will". She said simply, still not looking at him.

"Friends who believed the worse of you at the first chance they got. Do you think that people who treat you like that are really your friends?"

She remained silent. Will was right, she knew that.

"I know Will, but still..." She told him doubtfully. "There's also what Mike will have to go through if everyone finds out, the bullying, the teasing...his friends' reactions".

"Mike is used to that El, he won't care about it if he has to endure it for you". He told her trying to convince her, but for El they were just empty words.

"You speak about this as if we were in love or something. We're just lusty teenagers taking advantage of each other. Mike doesn't feel anything for me". She said skeptically.

"I think you're wrong El. I've known Mike since we were kids, he would never get into an empty relationship with anyone".

"This isn't a relationship Will, we don't even like each other". She refuted, slightly tired of talking about her 'thing' with Mike.

"Are you sure about that? I think the protectiveness he showed towards you tonight is proof enough that Mike has feelings for you".

El hadn't really thought about that. Sure, Mike had been so sweet to her. And a complete gentleman when she had thrown herself at him. She blushed as she remembered how wantonly she had expressed her desire to have sex with him.

Was Will right? Did Mike really see her as something other than a convenient, willing mouth to kiss? A body to feel?

"I don't know Will..." She said, still hesitant. El found it hard to believe that Mike would want her.

"You didn't see his face when you asked me to keep your secret, he looked disappointed". She could only look at him disbelievingly, wide brown eyes staring at Will in wonder.

Without noticing, they had reached her house. El saw her way out of this situation and took it.

"So, this is me".

"Yes". He agreed simply, seemingly thinking about something else. And then he spoke again.

"El, before you go in...I know how you feel about this, you've been pretty clear about it tonight, but you have to sort out your feelings and decide on what you want. Otherwise you're going to lose him".

"What?"

"You heard me". He said firmly and then he paused, considering his next words.

"I just want the best for you guys, and I know Mike, he is loyal, and he can be very persistent on the things he loves, but if you hurt him you will lose him. He doesn't forgive and forget easily".

She stared silently at him, contemplating the severity of Will's words.

"Just tell him how you feel, for better or for worse. Don't lead him on".

She nodded slowly, still distracted and deep in thought.

"I'll think about it. Thank you Will. For tonight".

"Anytime El. Good night!"

"Night".

El opened the door to find an empty house. Hopper was at Joyce's tonight, so El made her way upstairs to her room. Her brain was still reeling on Will's words and she felt fearful and apprehensive. She didn't want to hurt Mike, but she didn't think that going public was the best idea either.

Was Will right? Was she playing with fire by being with Mike just as *friends* with benefits? Were they even friends? Were they something more?

She sighed tiredly, feeling weary about tonight's events, her chat with Will and praying that she wouldn't be hungover tomorrow. But as she removed her clothes and got ready for bed, El decided she would talk

to Mike the next day.

If there was something she was sure of, it was that she didn't want lose Mike.

Mike was still asleep when his mother woke him up to tell him there was someone on the phone for him. He was pleasantly surprised to hear El at the other end of the line and even more happy when she asked him if they could meet that Sunday afternoon.

It was now 2 pm and Mike waited anxiously for the knock on his basement's door. El would be coming soon and while he was happy to see her again he was also worried about her sudden, unexpected request to meet with him. They usually just met on weekdays, so her call definitely took him by surprise.

The soft knock interrupted his thoughts and there she was, bathed in the afternoon sunlight like a vision in white. She was wearing one of her lovely sundresses, white and lacey, with a denim jacket and a pair of brown flats. She was beautiful.

"Hi". She said simply, as she closed the door. And to his surprise, not even giving him time to utter a word, she walked purposely and threw her arms around him in a tight hug. As soon as his mind allowed it, he reciprocated the hug and her greeting.

"Hi El". He told her softly, closing his eyes comfortably as he inhaled the fresh raspberry fragrance of her shampoo.

They broke apart slowly and Mike felt the unbearable need to kiss her, but he refrained and instead allowed himself to be pulled towards the couch, where El was already taking him by the hand. They sat swiftly, facing each other and she was the first to speak.

"Mike, I wanted to explain...about me and Brad". She said, sounding a bit uncertain. Feeling her indecision, Mike nodded reassuringly and took her hand trying to encourage her to continue.

"He caught up with me on Friday, depressed and wanting to talk about Tammy. I tried to comfort him, and we ended up hugging. I

guess Tammy saw us or somebody did and told her, making up this story that we were kissing". She finished simply, though without really looking at Mike.

Despite everything he might have thought about El in the past, he believed her. He had come to acknowledge that maybe he had been wrong about her. That she wasn't the terrible Ice Queen he had thought she was.

"Hey". He said as he softly took her chin and lifted her face to look at him. "I believe you".

El could only look at him, wide-eyed and amazed by how easy it was everything with Mike. She smiled timidly and nodded.

Then she brought her hand to caress his cheek lovingly.

"Why are you so good to me? I don't deserve your kindness Mike". She asked him, looking into his eyes.

Mike didn't like that she thought she was undeserving of him and his affections. His free hand mimicked hers and went to her cheek.

"You do El, you deserve kindness, love...you deserve everything". He told her, sounding far too serious and passionate for his mere seventeen years.

El couldn't find the right words to correspond with his fervent declaration, so she opted for kissing him. Needy and soft; then hungry until it became a heated contest between their tongues.

They pulled apart slowly, both looking dizzily at the other while smiling softly. El pecked him one more time and leaned him to hug him, resting her head comfortably on his shoulder.

"Thank you, Mike. Things...haven't been easy for me since mom died". She told him quietly and Mike felt a sudden stab of pain for her.

In response, he squeezed her tighter to him.

"I also wanted to say thank you, for worrying about me and not

letting me drink myself into oblivion yesterday". She said, deliberately leaving out the part where she threw herself at him.

Mike on the other hand, remembered that *other* part of yesterday's events too well.

He blushed at the thought but decided to ask anyway.

"About that...did you mean what you said? About...about the sex. With me". He said, awkwardly managing to ask the question that had been burning in the back of his brain for the last 24 hours.

El froze and felt a profound embarrassment quickly invading her body. She withdrew herself from his chest to face him

"Huh...so, I did really say that..." She said embarrassingly, avoiding his gaze. "This isn't awkward at all..."

Mike mistook her embarrassment for regret and started rambling to save himself and El from even more mortification.

"Hey, don't worry, I get it. You were drunk, out of your mind probably..."

"Mike". She interrupted softly, now searching for his gaze.

"...delusional even..."

"Mike!"

"What?" He said, finally ending his ramble and looking at her.

"I do". She admitted decidedly.

"You do...what?" He asked, puzzled.

"I do want you to be my first". She said softly, giving him a shy smile.

"You...you do?" He croaked nervously, visibly dumbfounded.

"Yes". She said, this time looking at him amusedly.

"You do!" He exclaimed excitedly, a cocky grin taking over his face.

"You want a piece of the Paladin!"

She rolled her eyes faking annoyance.

"Don't let it get to your head Wheeler, I can still change my mind and hook up with Brad. After all, I do have a reputation to maintain". She said as matter of fact.

"Of course you do. Though I wonder if Brad can make you feel the way I do every time I kiss you like this..."—he kissed her softly on the mouth— "...or every time I do this". He stated as he dived to suck on the delicate skin of her neck.

And suddenly she was breathless.

"I doubt he ever could Mike..." She managed to say, still out of breath and desperately lost in the sensations.

And suddenly he wasn't there anymore.

"I thought so. Don't let it get to your head Hopper". He warned, winking suggestively and kissing her forehead fondly.

"Hey! I was enjoying that!" She whined, smacking him in the chest playfully. He laughed and kissed her one more time, though he didn't resume his activities on her neck. Regrettably, in El's opinion.

"What about you? Will this be your first time?" She asked curiously.

He blushed, then nodded quietly. He felt slightly self-conscious about still being a virgin, as almost every seventeen-year-old boy *ever*.

"Why me then? You could choose anyone you wanted, not someone you don't even like".

"Who says I don't like you? And anyways, I could ask you the same question: why me?"

"Touch  ". She said smiling widely, though she soon sobered up and answered him.

"Truth is, you make me feel safe and wanted; in spite of everything I

am and the way I've behaved towards you".

"I think you're wrong El. About everything you say you are". She just watched him quietly.

Taking her silence as a good sign, he ventured even further.

"You're not really the Ice Queen, are you? You just pretend to be that, so you can fit in".

El contemplated his words carefully. Then she exhaled wearily.

"I don't really know who I am anymore. I know that sounds trite but once you get into that world, you kind of lose perspective".

"Then get it back". He said simply, making it sound so easy.

She shook her head.

"Despite everything, I do like to be a cheerleader, I wouldn't be able to leave the squad".

"Who says you have to? You can be a cheerleader and a good person, there's no need to be mean all the time".

"Mike it's not that easy".

"No, you're the one making it difficult". He countered, now slightly irritated. El didn't respond.

"What are you afraid of? Losing your friends? The ones who instantly believed you had betrayed one of them?" Again, she didn't say anything.

"What are we El? You want me to be your first because you feel safe with me, but we still lie to everyone about the nature of our relationship". Mike was slowly getting frustrated with her silence, but then she spoke.

"I don't think people would react very well".

"Who cares about people?!" Mike asked her passionately though

sounding extremely naïve to El.

"I do! And what do you think your precious friends will say?" She argued.

"They will understand". He said, as if it was an obvious, sure thing.

"Will they? Think about it Mike, really think about it. They aren't all Will. I'm pretty sure Max hates me, and I don't think Lucas and Dustin are as forgiving as you think, they will not be ok with you hiding something like this from them".

"It's not their business what I do or don't do..."

"Yes, but they are your best friends, they will be hurt, and you will suffer because of that". She reasoned, trying to make him see how much of a bad idea *this (them)* was.

"So, what do you propose then? Keep hiding forever?" Mike asked disappointedly.

"Your faith in us is admirable". She remarked dryly.

"Don't mock this El, please". He said, slightly hurt by her crass opinion on their relationship.

"I'm...not, it's just difficult...to deal with all of this. I don't want you to be hurt by this...thing". She explained, softly stroking his cheek in an apologetic gesture. He leaned into the caress and nodded understandingly.

"What about you? Won't your friends flip?"

"Probably. Tammy will have a heart attack and Jennifer will faint in the middle of the cafeteria. And they will organize a meeting to vote me out of the squad". She joked and Mike couldn't help but laugh.

"Ok, so I understand your point. Maybe we can wait a bit longer before we come out to our friends". He conceded, albeit reluctantly.

"Good. Now kiss me". She said firmly, though giving him sweet smile at the same time.

A huge grin broke into his face before he gladly complied.

His kiss started slow and sensuous, his lips barely grazing hers; teasing and provocative. El melted and tried to get closer to him, leaning in over him. And Mike suddenly found himself on his back in the couch, with El sprawled dangerously over him.

The kiss deepened as he ran his hands over her back, grazing her buttocks and reaching over the sides of her thighs through her dress. He urgently wanted to feel more of her, a desperation that was fueled even more when he touched the soft skin of her bare thighs under her dress.

El moaned at the feel of his hands and her mouth left his lips to kiss his neck. She began licking him softly, alternating between sucking and nipping and Mike felt like he was going crazy over the sensations. Her body instinctively sought his, rubbing against his in sumptuous torture, making them want more.

Suddenly, his hands were on her bottom, pushing her center against his crotch and they both moaned at the much-desired contact. El could feel the wetness soaking into her panties as Mike's erection deliciously stroked her through his jeans, while her hands went under his shirt, trying to get the hem to go up and free the skin of his abs to her touch.

Their frenzied movements ended abruptly though, as Mike's mom called him from upstairs.

Mike and El pulled apart, both panting and looking at the other hungrily for a few more seconds. He smiled softly, pecked her again and pulled her to him in a brief, tender hug.

"She just has the best timing. *Ever*". He commented jokingly and El chuckled.

"She does". She agreed as she started to get off of him.

El began to fix her hair and adjusted her dress, while Mike tried –in vain– to tame his curls and mentally will his erection to subside.

"You may have to wait a while before going up". She pointed out

cheekily.

"Tell me about it..." He said and groaned as he confirmed that his 'predicament' wasn't gone.

El just smiled sympathetically and kissed his forehead tenderly.

"See you tomorrow? Maybe we can sneak out at lunch?" She asked him as she got up to leave.

"I'll make something up and meet you at the AV room". He said, letting go of her hand.

She nodded and went to the door.

"Have a nice Sunday!" She said ironically, teasing him.

"Oh, I intent to! Got plenty to think about today". He told her smirking and wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

"Careful with your hand Wheeler". She told him in a sing-song voice, teasing him a bit more.

"Ha-ha". He said sarcastically.

She laughed, opened the door and theatrically blew him a kiss before finally leaving.

Mike smiled at her retreating form and sunk low into the cushions, he still had a bit to go before he looked 'presentable' for his mother.

Without her presence to distract him from actually thinking, it dawned on Mike that once again they had neglected to talk about the status of their relationship. Other than agreeing to keep hiding it, they hadn't talked about their feelings, if there were any. He didn't really want to admit it –to himself and certainly not to El– but he was pretty sure he was falling in love with her.

Problem was, he didn't have any idea what she felt for him, or if she felt anything at all.

At least we are not at each other's throats anymore. I suppose that's

progress.

Meanwhile, El walked home with a content smile on her face.

She felt good about her afternoon with Mike and not only because of the heated kisses they had shared, but due the understanding they had reached. And even though she hadn't been completely honest with him about her feelings as she had initially intended, she still felt optimistic about how things were going between them.

She was sure she would tell him eventually. Just not right now. She still needed time before opening herself up to him. Before she told him she felt wonderful when she was with him. Or that he made her laugh every time they were together. Or that his kisses made her go weak in the knees all the time. And that maybe, just maybe, she was falling in love with him.

No. Not maybe. A resounding 'yes' it's more likely. She thought as she let out a silly, goofy laugh.

El decided then that she would enjoy the rest of her Sunday. She would take Hopper out for ice cream and she would deal with her friends in the morning.

Screw them!

7. Let's go to bed

AN/: Thanks for the comments! I apologize for the delay on posting this chapter, life has gotten in the way!

Just a warning: mature content ahead.

Chapter 7. Let's go to bed

The week following Stacey's party was a tough one for El. After much explaining and apologizing, Tammy finally forgave her, and everything went back to normal within the cheerleading squad. But she could still notice the underlying scorn in the looks they gave her and the impertinence of their tone as they questioned some of her directions in cheerleading practice.

There was also a new development in the 'We hate El Hopper Club': every time she passed Max Mayfield in the halls or saw her anywhere in school, she would give her the most contemptuous look she could muster. El couldn't help but wonder if maybe she knew something about her relationship with Mike and her face couldn't really hide the hate she felt for her.

Wanting to know more, she mentioned it to him a week later, on Wednesday afternoon, while they worked on their history project. They were seated side by side on the basement's couch, surrounded by books and open notebooks, pens and papers on their hands.

"I think she is still pissed because Will had to leave the party to get you home". Mike explained simply, shrugging his shoulders nonchalantly after she told him about the weird looks Max gave her.

"How is that her problem?" She asked him, rolling her eyes in annoyance at the redhead's prying.

"Well, underneath that tough exterior she puts up, Max is actually very protective of all of us. She doesn't understand why would Will do anything for you when you're not really our friend". He clarified, feeling a bit uncomfortable discussing the subject.

"Oh". She said, realization coming to her slowly. "I guess she's right". El agreed, looking away from him for a moment, seemingly ashamed.

He smiled sadly and nodded.

"Anyway, she'll get over it so don't think too much about it". Mike said cheerily, trying to lighten the mood.

"Ok. I won't". She conceded, though not sounding very convinced.

"You don't think she knows about us, do you?" She asked as an afterthought, in a slightly panicked tone.

"I doubt it, she would have yelled at me by now". He tried to joke.

"Huh. I guess..." She agreed uncertainly.

"Don't worry about it El, she was ok these past two days. She hasn't even mentioned the party or you, for that matter".

"Fine. You're right, I'm just probably being paranoid. Let's change the subject. So, you think we'll be done with this essay by next week?"

"Hell yeah!" He exclaimed excitedly. "We are so going to ace this thing! Then we can just focus on the presentation and we'll have like a month to do that so, even better".

She smiled at his enthusiasm.

"Yeah, it's going to be awesome. I like how it's coming along so far".

"Then we can just...spend time with each other? No history project to get between us?"

"Hmm, sounds promising". She said smiling softly before leaning closer to kiss him.

Mike immediately surrendered to her, and what started as a sweet kiss, quickly escalated to a full-blown make out session. And, as it was common for them these days, they ended up in a tangle of limbs, sprawled on the couch and struggling for breath.

When they broke apart a few minutes later, Mike took the opportunity to bring up something that had been on his mind lately. He sat up straight on the couch and contemplated El as she rearranged her hair, thinking on how to approach the subject.

He decided to just do it.

"Speaking of spending time together, my parents won't be home this weekend, they're taking Holly with them to visit my grandma in the city...maybe we could watch a movie or something?" He felt truly nervous about the prospect of being completely alone with El in his house, but he emboldened himself and asked her nonetheless.

Lately Mike felt like he desperately wanted to be with her all the time. It was as if their little rendezvous in school and at his house weren't enough. He wanted more. Mike kept thinking that maybe if they had a normal, public relationship, things would be better, easier; and he wouldn't feel so needy all the time.

Or maybe he just wanted to be with her really, really badly. As in, truly *be* with her, in a very much sexual way. He wasn't going to lie, ever since their conversation on Sunday after Stacey's party, Mike's mind constantly thought about having sex with El. He just didn't know when it would be the right time for them and he didn't want to ruin it by pushing her into something she wasn't ready for.

Still, his treacherous mind had already pinpointed that next Saturday would be a great day to go for it, since his parents would be away and all. He would have to call his sister Nancy and ask her for advice, he wasn't exactly an expert on pleasing women. And even if they didn't do anything, he wanted to be prepared and know more so that, when it did happen, they would have a good time.

"Mike!"

"Huh? Oh sorry!" He apologized nervously, looking back at her.

"You were far away". She said chuckling a little. "Anyway, I was saying that yes, I would like to catch a movie with you on Saturday".

"Oh! Cool". He said excitedly, almost sounding like a squeak.

Mike cringed inwardly.

Don't be such a mouthbreather!

Meanwhile El just stared at him amusedly, with a teasing smile on her face.

"Why are you so nervous all of a sudden?" She asked, more curious than anything.

"No reason!" He said jumpily.

She frowned, giving him an incredulous look.

"Really! I'm fine". He reassured her or at least tried. El wasn't buying it.

"If you say so. Anyway, I have to go now. As usual, it's been a pleasure Wheeler". She told him, smirking mischievously before kissing him softly. She started to gather her things and soon she was at the door, waving at him one last time before walking out.

"Bye El". He said softly, giving her a lopsided smile and looking at her with wide, heart eyes.

She smiled sweetly at him, blew him a kiss and then she was gone.

The moment El left his house Mike ran to the phone and dialed Nancy's number. He would be damned if he ruined their first time by not having knowledge on even the most basic aspects of lovemaking.

He waited nervously, a leg bouncing repeatedly as he listened to the dial tone and waited for Nancy to pick up at the other end.

"Hello?"

"Oh, hey Nancy! It's Mike".

"Hi Mike, what's up? Everything ok at home?" They didn't talk that often on the phone, so Nancy was surprised to hear her little brother's voice.

"Yeah, yeah everything's cool. I'm calling... well, I'm calling because I wanted to ask you for advice". He told her nervously, feeling his palms suddenly sweaty.

"Hmm advice on what? I'm all ears". Now she was even more curious about Mike's call.

"On girls. Well, one girl in particular".

"Ohhhhhhhhhh. You like someone! How come this is the first time I'm hearing of this? Does mom know? She must be jumping up and down with joy!" She teased.

"Nancy!"

"What?"

"It's not like that. We are not together *together*". He explained, poorly.

"What do you mean?" She asked, and Mike could imagine the frown on her face. He sighed, slightly frustrated.

And so, Mike related the story of his tribulations with El to his sister. Nancy listened quietly and in wonder to what her brother recounted. She would've never imagined he had it in him to have a secret, almost forbidden (for high school standards, anyway), relationship.

"Wow. My little brother the clandestine lover, who would have thought!" She exclaimed amusedly.

He groaned and bumped his head on the wall in frustration. He was starting to regret this call.

"It's not amusing!"

"Chill Mike, I think I'm proud actually". She explained, chuckling lightly.

"Anyway, I didn't call you to tell you the story of my life, I wanted...I want to ask you about sex...I think we're going to cross that line soon and I want to be prepared".

"Oh. Big step Mike".

"I know".

"Ok, first I need to know: do you love her?"

At her question the line fell silent, for a moment she thought he might have left.

"I think...I might be in love with her". He answered hesitantly.

"Have you told her this?"

"What?! No way!" He almost shouted, panic filling his voice.

"Mike. Honesty. Even if you're keeping this from everyone, you should be honest with each other".

He sighed dejectedly.

"It's complicated Nance".

"Fine, I won't push you. Just know that sex is way better when the two people are emotionally on the same page".

She didn't wait for him to say anything and continued.

"That being said, the first thing you need is protection, do you have any?"

"Errr, no. I know the school nurse has a stash to give away to students, maybe I could get them there?".

"Hmm yes, though I wouldn't use those. You should buy the good stuff. Go to the pharmacy in the skirts of town, it's unlikely that you will run into anyone you know there". She explained.

"What? How do you know..."

"Do you really want me to answer that question Mike?" She asked flatly.

"No, I guess not". He conceded, cringing at the thought of her sister

having to buy condoms.

"Good. Now to the most important part. Don't push her into anything, be patient and enjoy the preamble". She paused, searching for her next words carefully.

"Don't be rushing to get off, sex is much more than that and if she is not ready enough, it will hurt. Help her *become* ready, use lube, use your mouth and your hands to please her before you go for the main event. Go slow and be communicative, ask her and she will tell you how she feels". She paused again for a moment.

"Let it flow, nature will do the rest". She finished pensively.

He nodded solemnly, even if Nancy couldn't see him.

"Wow...that's actually helpful". He told her, slightly awed by his sister's words. Of course, he knew these things were basic stuff, but he marveled at how well Nancy had conveyed the message and gave him the confidence he needed at the same time.

"You are nice guy Mike, just the fact that you're worried about her reflects on how much you care. You will do fine". She told him reassuringly.

"Thank you, Nancy. I really appreciate this. And please don't t..."

"Don't tell mom. I know".

"Or Jonathan, or anyone for that matter".

"Ok".

"I'm just trying to respect her wishes". He added, trying to explain why he was insisting on this.

"Would you like her to be your girlfriend then?" She asked him, curiosity getting the better of her.

"I...yes. I think so, yes".

"You should tell her Mike. You should fight for what you want".

Mike remained silent for a bit.

"She's doesn't want to go public". He finally said, resignedly.

"I remember she used to be a sweet kid, but if she is not willing to consider you for something more than sex, then maybe she doesn't deserve you".

At his silence, she sighed and continued softly.

"Just be careful Mike, I don't want you to get hurt".

He was surprised by her caring tone. They had always gotten along well, but up until now he hadn't thought she cared that much about him.

"I won't, I promise". He assured her firmly.

"Ok. Call me if you need anything else, yes?"

"Sure, thanks Nance. Bye!" He said, hanging up the phone.

Mike was confident that El wouldn't hurt him and that she eventually would recognize that he was right, and they should date normally. But until then he was fully determined to enjoy every minute of their relationship.

Even if it involved biking for almost half an hour to the furthest pharmacy in Hawkins.

On Thursday, Mike was planning to go to the pharmacy after school. That day he didn't have to meet with El for their project and his homework for Friday was pretty much finished. What he didn't see coming was to be intercepted by his friends at the bike rack, just as he was preparing to leave.

He had left his last class in a hurry, rushing to get to his bike before his friends could reach him. No such luck though.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?" Dustin asked curiously, as he started to unchain his own bike.

Mike looked at the ground nervously, but suddenly looked up again.

"I...my mom! She wants me to babysit Holly".

"Right now? Doesn't she go to ballet classes on Thursdays or something?" Lucas asked looking at him puzzled. Mike seldomly had to babysit his sister on week days, especially in the afternoon.

"Not today, no. Teacher has the flu". He explained quickly.

"Huh. The flu. Interesting". Max stated flatly, narrowing her eyes suspiciously.

"Yeah terrible thing, apparently lots of people are getting it these days". Mike continued lamely.

Shut up! You're making it worse!

"Must be all that kissing going around, right?" She continued impertinently, looking pointedly at him. Though Mike was sure that this subtle interaction was only perceived by the two of them. She had to know something was going on.

"Hmm, right". He agreed awkwardly. Thankfully, Will spoke, diverting Max's attention from him.

"Well, we're heading down to Benny's to grab a bite...maybe we could hang out on Saturday?" He asked, trying to change the subject.

"Ah...Saturday it's not good..." Mike told him apologetically.

Max snorted inelegantly.

"Why not? What do you have to do that's better than hang out with us?" She pressed insistently.

Mike thought quickly and answered her, praying that she believed him and laid the matter to rest.

"My dad, he wants to help him fix a bunch of stuff around the house, who knows when it will be finished, we'll probably be on it all Saturday..."

"Hey, it's ok Mike, we get it". Will said understandingly.

By the look on Max's face, *she* didn't get it. In fact, Mike was pretty sure she knew he was lying.

"How about we do something tomorrow night? Maybe catch a film at the Hawk?" He suggested quickly, desperately trying to move on from this conversation.

"Sounds cool". Dustin agreed, and the others nodded. But not Max, she just kept staring daggers at him.

Mike ignored her.

"Great! Well, talk to you tomorrow, gotta run. Bye!" He said as he mounted on his bike and pedaled away as quickly as he could.

"Something's up with him". Max stated, arms crossed defiantly and a frown on her face.

"Oh c'mon Max, he just has to look out for his little sister". Dustin said shrugging.

"No. It's not just today, he's been weird since he started that project with Hopper". She said pensively.

"You really think there's something going on there? Apart from the fact that they hate each other's guts?" Lucas asked Max disbelievingly.

"Do they, though? He's barely mentioned her in weeks. That's weird". She wondered with a calculating look on her face.

"Why? Maybe they're getting along just fine for the project". Will suggested.

"C'mon Will, this is Mike, when has he ever *not* complained about *everything*?" She retorted sarcastically.

"Give him some credit, maybe he has matured". He proposed sensibly.

She looked skeptically at Will.

"I highly doubt it".

Meanwhile, Lucas and Dustin just watched the whole exchange, not really wanting to take sides.

"So...Benny's?" Lucas asked tentatively.

"Yes, Benny's!" Dustin agreed cheerily.

"Yeah let's go". Max agreed aloofly, seemingly still deep in thought.

Will watched her carefully as they started to walk. She was on to something.

He only hoped that Mike was sensible enough to know what he was doing. If their friends ever found out about his secret, it wouldn't be pretty. And not because it was El, but because he hadn't thought they were important enough to know.

On Saturday, Mike was in a good mood. He had woken up late, enjoying the rest that only sleeping in provided and eating breakfast without hurrying too much, basking in the loveliness of his empty house. On top of that, his quest for condoms the day before had gone more than alright. He hadn't panicked when buying them and the clerk at the pharmacy had paid him no mind, going through his business as usual.

Strangely enough, he didn't feel pressured to have sex or nervous about the possibility of finally doing it. He just wanted to have a good time with El that afternoon and enjoy her company as much as he could; though he wasn't going to deny that he was also proud of himself for being prepared in case of any eventuality.

Mike took a shower just before noon, preparing for El's arrival at 2pm. They had decided to watch *Stand by me*, a favorite of Mike's that El had yet to watch. After grabbing some lunch from the fridge, he went down to the basement to check that it was clean, that the VCR was set up properly and that the movie was actually there. Then he went back upstairs to make some popcorn and bring some sodas with him to the basement.

Just as he was finishing with the popcorn, the doorbell rang. He set the bowl on the kitchen counter and practically ran to open the door. And there she stood, beaming at him happily, wearing a pair of very small denim shorts, a simple aquamarine t-shirt and her signature white Chucks. Her lips looked extra kissable today, with the aroma of cherry chapstick invading his senses as she approached him. And her legs...he couldn't take his eyes off them...

"Hi! I brought Raisinets!" She told him excitedly as she closed the door, launching herself at him the minute she was inside the house.

Mike was still dazed by her looks and barely managed to catch her, though he quickly caught up with her and responded eagerly to her kiss.

"Hi. You're extra cheery today". He commented as he pulled away from her slightly.

She smiled, running her hands along his chest softly.

"Am I? Maybe it's because I really wanted to see you". She explained shyly, still looking at him tenderly.

"Really? I wanted to see you too. Very much". He admitted, softly caressing her cheek and leaning in to kiss her lovingly.

Even though the kiss was brief, they felt like melting by each other's presence. There was a different sensation about today's get together and to Mike it felt almost like a date. It was the first time they saw each other because they wanted to and not because they had to work on their project or because they were sneaking around in the school. Today they were here because they wanted to be with each other.

"C'mon, the popcorn is ready". He said, taking her hand and pulling her behind him towards the kitchen.

"Hmm, sounds great. Extra butter?"

"Yep".

"They will go awesome with the Raisinets!"

He smiled in response to her enthusiasm, taking the bowl in his hands, while El took the soda cans with her and they made it downstairs. They put everything on the coffee table and Mike started to set up the movie. He pushed 'play' and they sat down on the couch, Mike holding the popcorn bowl in his lap and El cuddling comfortably against his side.

The movie passed without incident, with both of them concentrating on the plot, eating the snacks and occasionally commenting softly on some scene or another. Having El in his arms while enjoying such an ordinary activity as watching a movie, made Mike feel perfectly. It was just such a silly, normal thing to do, and yet, it was something so rare for them.

El sighed contently and cuddled closer to him, she seemed to be enjoying this afternoon just as much as him. In return, he hugged her tighter and kissed her forehead gently.

"I liked the movie, you were right, it was pretty nice".

"I'm glad you did. I would have felt bad if you hadn't, you know, for not renting a film like *Top Gun* or something equally boring". He said jokingly.

El chuckled and withdrew herself from his side to look at him seriously.

"Excuse me but I happen to like *that* movie". She said, but he could tell she was teasing him.

"Don't you mean you like Tom Cruise?" He asked, equally teasingly.

"No. I'd much rather have you than him". She retorted with mirth, but Mike took her admission very seriously and the smile suddenly left his mouth.

"Do you really?" He asked solemnly.

El felt the change in the air and sobered up from their previously playful interactions.

"Yes". She told him firmly.

His eyes widened for a fraction of a second, but then they showed an air of determination.

"You have me El". He said sincerely.

She observed him quietly, marveling at the depth of his dark eyes and the love she saw reflected in them. She stopped thinking then and kissed him softly, trying to replicate the feeling she saw in his eyes with her kiss. Mike felt her lips softly caressing his and brought his arms around her neck, pulling her to him, trying to deepen the contact.

El complied and got closer, pushing him down onto the couch and laying flush against him. Mike could feel the heat radiating off her body, her hips as they rubbed innocently on his own and her lips as they nipped and licked his relentlessly. He moaned softly and brought his hands to her back, stroking slowly, reaching down to her thighs and going back up to firmly grab her buttocks to push her into him.

Then, it was her turn to moan at the feeling. The friction generated by the movement of their bodies was driving them crazy. Soon they were panting, frantically kissing and touching each other. El thought she would faint from the sensations, she felt hot and desperately wanted to feel Mike even closer. He wasn't faring any better, his pants were constricting him and only the friction against her body managed to relieve the tension somewhat.

"Mike..." She said breathily, pulling away from him slightly.

"Yes..." He said numbly, eyes closed and lips swollen, too focused on the feelings she was eliciting.

"Take me to your room". She requested, sounding just as dazed as he had.

The words seemed to bring Mike out of his reverie. He opened his eyes and looked at her, *really* looked at her. She was flushed, her eyes sporting a glint of something he couldn't identify and her mouth slightly open and thoroughly kissed.

"What?" He asked cautiously, trying to understand if she was asking what he thought she was asking.

"Take me to your room Mike, I need you".

"You...you want to...*have sex*?" He thought he sounded incredibly dumb giving her a commentary of her own words. But El just smiled sweetly, almost patiently and touched his cheek softly, looking reassuringly into his eyes.

"Yes Mike, I want to be with you".

His eyes widened disbelievingly for a moment, but then a huge smile broke out on his face. He kissed her again passionately, as he tried to stand up bringing her with him, without breaking the kiss. She chuckled into his mouth and tried to follow him, both fumbling towards the stairs until it was impossible for them to climb them together.

They broke apart and laughed at the silliness of their situation. Then a look of understanding crossed between them and they broke into a run up the stairs, giggling and quickly getting out of the basement. Soon, they reached the other stairway, leading to the second story of the Wheeler household and suddenly they found themselves in front of his door.

Their eyes met once more and immediately, they were all over each other again, making out desperately. They fumbled as Mike tried to get the door until he finally opened it and they almost fell over on the carpet beside his bed. Mike had to let go of her momentarily to close the door, the pause giving them opportunity to catch their breath.

When he turned back, he saw her seated on his bed, admiring the number of items scattered around his room. As he looked at her there, it dawned on him that he was about to share something so especial with her, something so intimate. And oddly, he didn't feel nervous, he felt happy, so incredibly happy.

Mike walked towards the bed and sat down beside her, grabbing her hands and kissing them softly.

"Are you sure about this El?"

"Yes". She said simply, looking into his eyes.

He nodded, letting go of her hands and taking her face instead, pulling her closer for a sweet kiss. After a moment he pulled away slowly, his eyes not leaving hers and smiled softly.

"Just a sec". He said as he got up from the bed and walked to his closet. He pulled out a brown paper bag and returned to the bed. There he took out a box of condoms and a bottle of lube and placed them on the bedside table.

"Protection". He stated obviously.

"Oh". She said simply, feeling silly. "I didn't even think about that".

He smiled and returned to her. He sat down and touched her shoulder comfortingly, rubbing up and down. She smiled at his tenderness and reached down at the hem of her t-shirt pulling it over her head in one swift movement. Mike was surprised by her bold move, but it was quickly replaced by awe as he stared at her midriff, clad in simple white bra.

He reached out and touched her stomach experimentally, as if feeling the texture of the skin in her belly. She shuddered at the contact and reached behind her to unclasp her bra, freeing her breasts to his sight. Mike could only look at her, unable to take his eyes off her chest.

At that moment, El was all determination and zero shyness.

She stood up and kicked off her sneakers, reaching down to the fly of her shorts, unbuttoning them and opening the zipper until she was standing before his marveled gaze in nothing but her white bikini underwear. She was staring him boldly yet timidly, trying to decipher what he was thinking. But suddenly he was right before her, taking her face into his hands and kissing her hungrily.

"You're so beautiful El". He told her as he pulled away and rested his forehead against hers. She smiled shyly and tugged at the hem of his shirt. He backed off from her slightly and helped her to take it off.

She brought her hands to deliciously caress his chest and Mike shivered, closing his eyes and losing himself in the sensations. Then she went for the fly of his jeans, while he mirrored her previous actions and kicked off his own shoes, helping her to pull down his pants and socks off him.

Now they were standing in front of each other, clad in their underwear and admiring the other hungrily. El took the first step and took his hand, tugging him into the bed with her. They fell down on it, with Mike hovering over her. He kissed her fully, supporting his weight on his hands to avoid crushing her, while his hips desperately sought hers and accommodated themselves snugly between her legs.

They moaned as they thrust against each other, the feeling sending intimate vibrations through their skin and into their cores. Mike fondled her breasts with his right hand while El tentatively sought his erection through his boxers and caressed it lightly.

Suddenly he remembered Nancy's words and let go of her mouth, kissing down her throat, pausing to kiss each of her breasts softly and going down to her stomach until he reached her panties. He looked up at her, silently asking for permission, she nodded, and he carefully started to pull them down her hips. She raised her body to help him getting them off and found herself bare to his gaze. He sat down on his heels and contemplated her for a moment.

El didn't even have time to feel self-conscious because suddenly Mike was on her, his face between her legs and his hands on her thighs. And almost immediately, she felt herself getting lost, all coherent thought leaving her. All she could feel was his mouth on her.

She could have never imagined that having someone sucking and licking at her clitoris would feel like this. He sucked gently, licking her nether lips, while his hands caressed her thighs hypnotically. El felt like dying, the intensity of the sensations almost becoming unbearable.

On his part, Mike found the sensation of licking her strange but not unpleasant. Moreover, he felt powerful and proud to be the one bringing her so much pleasure. Relying on instinct, he sucked and nibbled on her clitoris, alternating between licking and getting his

tongue into her. And by the little sounds El was making, he thought he was doing it alright.

Dutifully, he kept performing his ministrations, while El caressed his hair frantically, pushing his face into her core insistently. And suddenly she came.

"Mikeeeeeeee...!" She whimpered.

He felt her vulva pulsate against his lips and took this as his cue that she had had enough, at least of oral sex. He didn't want to over stimulate her, so he went up and kissed her softly, giving her time to enjoy the remains of her orgasm. She smiled dazedly at him and kissed him eagerly.

She reached down and grabbed his erection through his boxers, with more confidence this time. Mike groaned in pleasure and rubbed against her, seeking the delicious friction, as he kissed her sloppily.

"I want you inside me Mike". She whispered sensuously, while looking into his eyes invitingly and with her hand still caressing his cock.

Mike nodded and quickly started to shed his underwear. It was El's turn to contemplate him as he threw his boxers away and grabbed the box from the nightstand. She was fascinated by his shape, jutting proudly, soft and hard at the same time, long and thick without being overtly monstrous. She found she liked his body a lot.

Meanwhile Mike, fumbled with the box until he could get a condom out, he opened it and quickly started to roll it down his shaft. He finished, discarded the wrapper and took the bottle of lube from his bedside table. As her curious look he explained.

"It's supposed to make it easier for you, less painful". He said smiling apologetically.

"Oh. You thought about everything, didn't you?" She told him fondly, and he blushed.

"I wanted this to be great for the both of us".

"Thank you". She said softly, really feeling grateful for his thoughtfulness.

"May I?" He asked as he signaled towards her center.

She nodded, and he put a small amount of the gooey gel on his finger, then he carefully inserted it on her vagina and gently spread the gel inside her. Silently he set the bottle on the table and turned back to her. He smiled softly and leaned in, hovering on top of her. Then he kissed her and lowered himself fully, crushing his chest against her breasts delicately.

Having him on top of her, fully in contact with her skin felt amazing for El. She felt consumed by the weight of his body in a pleasant way and she desperately wanted to feel more. In that moment she felt him shift his hips slightly and now she could feel the tip of his penis seeking entrance. She grabbed it gently and guided him inside her.

Mike looked at her before pushing his way in, once more trying to make sure she was really ok with this. Her eyes met his, filled with want and trust, and right then he knew she wanted this as much as he wanted it. He kissed her tenderly.

Slowly, Mike started to push forward, doing his best to avoid causing her pain, monitoring her expressions to see if she was doing alright. El didn't seem to be in any pain, but he stopped nonetheless once he was fully inside, waiting for her get comfortable.

The intrusion felt foreign to El, different from the old familiar feeling of her fingers when she played with herself, but it wasn't completely painful. She encouraged him to move again by grabbing his buttocks and pushing him into her, he took the hint and started moving slowly, in and out of her. Her muscles quickly adjusted, and the friction began to feel pleasant, building up slowly into something more intense.

Mike kept peppering her face with kisses, trying to maintain the sensual rhythm without finishing too soon. The feeling of El wrapped around him was the best feeling he had ever experienced. He was dazed, numb even; he felt his skin tingling with pleasure and their joint bodies felt as one as they moved together in search of their

mutual release.

He listened to her as she moaned in pleasure and increased his pace, feeling closer and closer to his orgasm, but not wanting to come before her. He brought his hand to where their bodies were joined and started to rub her clitoris gently.

"Mike that feels..." She managed to breathe out.

El closed her eyes and surrendered herself to her orgasm. The intensity of her reaction got Mike even more aroused, making him pump faster until finally, the clenching of her walls around his cock made him come deliciously.

"El..." He groaned softly, kissing and sucking on her neck desperately, as he enjoyed the last waves of his orgasm.

He stopped moving and let himself momentarily fall on top of her and enjoy the comfort of her body. They were both panting, flushed and slightly sweaty. He withdrew from her, still in awe at the pleasure he had felt moments before and took the condom off. He tied a knot around it and set it on the nightstand. Then he grabbed a tissue and cleaned himself up, while El silently (dazedly) watched him.

He smiled softly and discarded the tissue, before leaning over to kiss her tenderly and laying down beside her on the bed. As soon as he was on his back, El scooted closer and laid her head on his chest, throwing an arm around him and sighing contently as she cuddled up to his side.

"That was..." Mike said, trailing off, not really able to find the words he wanted to use to describe the experience.

"Amazing? Mind-blowing? Awesome? All of the above?" She finished for him jokingly.

He chuckled.

"Definitely all of the above".

"I agree". She said, patting his chest lightly.

They remained in silence for the next few minutes, both basking in the afterglow of their orgasms. Though for Mike, 'basking' was proving to be a bit difficult, near to impossible. Because as he laid there, comfortably snuggled up with El in his bed, he was struck by a particular realization, only made clear to him by the euphoria brought forth by making love to her: he really was in love with El Hopper.

Without thinking, he started to blurt it out.

"El, I...I think..."

But something stopped him, made him second-guess himself and he recoiled.

Don't ruin this now!

"You what?" She asked curiously, lifting her head from his chest to look at him properly.

"It's nothing, forget it please". He said, trying to sound convincing and smiling reassuringly at her.

"Ok". She said, a bit uncertain at first but seeing his dopey grin, she decided to let it go.

El went back to her original position, resting her head on his chest, snuggling up to him again comfortably.

"Hmmm, I'm suddenly so sleepy". She admitted lazily, stroking his stomach softly.

He kissed the top of her head fondly and languidly stroked her shoulder.

"Sleep, it's still early anyway".

She nodded against his chest and closed her eyes, hugging him once more before sighing happily, feeling completely sated.

Mike remained awake, with only one thought on his mind.

I love her.

8. Girls don't cry

AN/: Thanks for reading and following the story :) I'm so sorry for the very LATE update, my life has gotten hectic in the last few months!

Song: 'Catch' by The Cure. Robert James Smith / Simon Gallup / Porl Thompson / Laurence Andrew Tolhurst / Boris Williams. Catch © Universal Music Publishing Group

Chapter 8: *Girls don't cry*

Mike finally managed to sleep for a bit after he convinced himself that this wasn't the right time to tell El that he loved her. He thought he might as well enjoy the remainder of their afternoon together and get some rest after their previous activities.

Some time later he woke up again. El was still asleep, resting her head on his chest, so he took the opportunity to observe her. She was breathing softly on his skin, utterly relaxed, with an expression of contentment etched on her sleeping features. Mike found it hard to believe that she was there with him and that they just had sex. *Wonderful sex.*

As if she knew he was watching her, El stirred and groggily opened her eyes.

"Why are you staring at me Wheeler?" She asked him, smirking lightly at the panicked look on his face at being caught.

"I wasn't...you just looked peaceful. That's all".

"Well, I do feel at peace right now. *You* Mr. turned out to be very good at sex". She told him, as she emphasized her remark by poking his chest playfully with her right index finger.

He blushed and smiled shyly.

"Well...ah...good to know, I guess?" He asked, still shy and uncertain.

"Oh yes, very *good* to know". She said, suggestively teasing him and

leaning over for a kiss.

Her stomach chose that precise moment to growl in protest.

"So...it seems I might be hungry..." She said sheepishly, and Mike laughed wholeheartedly.

"Eggos?"

"Oh yes!" She exclaimed enthusiastically.

"If I didn't know any better, I would think you were related to Dustin". He said amusedly as he started to put on his boxers.

"Why?"

"He eats as much". He explained grinning.

"Hey! I don't eat that much. And what did you expect anyway? We burned a lot of calories today". She said as a matter of fact.

"Yeah, we did". He agreed, smiling goofily.

El grinned triumphally and stood up, leaving the sheet they had draped over themselves behind and giving Mike a full view of her body. He gasped, and his eyes widened. It's not as if he hadn't appreciated the view just mere hours ago, but seeing her like this, so carefree and in his room...made him excited and hard all over again.

Meanwhile, the girl of his dreams, was oblivious to his own musings, putting on her underwear and his discarded shirt.

"What?" She asked, as she saw him staring.

"Nothing. You just look...beautiful".

"Aww Mike, you're such a sweetie". She responded, walking towards him and kissing him passionately.

They pulled away both dizzy and smiling dopily at each other.

"C'mon let's get you fed Hopper". He said as he took her hand and pulled her towards the door to go downstairs.

El had to get back to her house by 9 pm, so the time they had left was spent between laughter, some teasing on El's part, Eggos and of course, a second round of sex for the new –and very enthusiast–lovers.

After El left, promising to call him tomorrow, Mike went to take a shower. His mind kept going back to the day's events: he didn't think their first time could have gone any better than this one. He was proud of himself for trying to make this an unforgettable and fond experience for both, but most of all he was so, so, so, happy.

A goofy smile adorned his face for the rest of the night and sleep was hard to come by as his mind kept wandering off to his afternoon of passion with El.

Mike decided he didn't care, he could sleep tomorrow.

Some weeks passed and Mike and El had yet to talk about their feelings. Both still comfortably ignoring the matter as they dove deeper and deeper into the sexual side of their relationship.

With their history project practically completed, most of the days spent down in the Wheelers' basement were dedicated to talk, listen to music, make out a lot and –of course– sneak around for quickies in the bathroom whenever possible. El enjoyed Mike's stories about his friends and listening to him talk about movies, while Mike liked when El talked about music and about her favorite band The Cure. They had even brought Nancy's old stereo from her room into the basement, so they could always listen to something while they hung out together.

In parallel to her wonderful times with Mike, El's friends were back at trying to set her up with guys. She was getting tired of finding excuses to refute their attempts while they exceeded at coming up with new guys for her virtually *all* the time. Ok, maybe not all the time...but still, it was annoying for El, who was on cloud nine with Mike. He was just so, so good!

So nice, so cute...so hot...!

She blushed at the thought of 'hot Mike'. But well, he just...was. Every time they had sex it felt even better than the last and he was always so dedicated to please her, so concerned that she'd have a good time. She couldn't ask for a more considerate lover.

El knew that things would be easier if they started dating properly, but she stubbornly refused, fearing that everything would fall apart by the pressure of their friends if they went public. And even if she wouldn't admit it, deep down El was afraid of what would happen to her popularity if people ever found out she was sleeping with one of the school's biggest nerds.

The arrival of her squad to the gym brought her out her thoughts.

"Hey girls". She greeted.

"Hey El". They responded, in a chorus of voices.

"Go change so we can start today's practice". The girls left to the dressing rooms with only Tammy, Jennifer and Stacey staying behind.

"So, El we were wondering, what are you doing this Friday?"

"I'm not sure yet. Why do you ask?" She asked knowing full well where this was going.

"Well, it's just...we are planning to go out, but we all have dates and we know you probably don't, so we were wondering..." Tammy explained awkwardly.

"Are you trying to set me up again?"

"Yes, as per usual". Stacey answered dryly while rolling her eyes.

"C'mon, I told you I'm not..."

"Yes, yes, 'not interested'. We know. Why is that by the way?" Jennifer intervened sarcastically.

"Yeah El, c'mon. You're popular, you're gorgeous. Are you gay? You know we wouldn't mind if you were!" Tammy said reassuringly.

El chuckled at her friends' concern.

"Still not gay, sorry. I don't know, I guess I'm just fine by myself?"

Liar.

"But don't you want to be happy?" Jennifer asked, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to need a boy in order to be happy.

"I'm happy and I don't need a boy to be so, Jennifer". She answered, rolling her eyes.

"Of course, you don't El, but it's nice to have a boyfriend anyway". Stacey agreed.

"We are asking because my cousin Blake it's visiting and who knows, maybe you two could hit it off!" Tammy explained excitedly.

"Yeah, we're all going to Benny's and to Stacey's house on Friday night, you should join us!" Jennifer added equally excited.

El thought about it for a moment. She knew Mike would be with his friends playing Dungeons and Dragons on Friday night, so there wouldn't be any chance of her running into him with her friends and her supposed 'date'. And if she went out with her friends and spent time with this Blake guy, they would probably lay off her for the next few weeks at least. All she had to do was show up and play nice.

Piece of cake, right?

"Ok, fine. I will go out with you on Friday night".

"Yes!" Exclaimed Tammy happily.

"Ok so you have to wear that blue dress you wore to Stacey's birthday last year! So Blake will lose it!"

She rolled her eyes, but acquiesced.

"Fine, fine! I'll be my usual charming self". She said sarcastically.

"What about Wheeler? Will he be happy that you're out on a date?"

Stacey asked out of the blue, her voiced laced with fake innocence and a hint of malice.

El's blood ran cold at Stacey's question.

"What does Wheeler have to do with anything?" She asked, suddenly angry.

"Hey, I'm just saying, you two seem to be attached to the hip lately".

"That's because of our stupid project. But don't worry, we're nearly finished, so you can forget all about your silly notions that there could be something between us". She clarified, sounding insulted by her implications.

"Yes, don't be silly Stace! As if!" Tammy added, clearly unable to comprehend how on earth Stacey would think that about her friend.

Stacey's mouth formed into a fake smile and El narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

"You are right, silly me". Stacey agreed flatly, though her tone implied that she thought exactly the opposite of what she was saying.

"We should go change, practice is about to start". Jennifer suggested, not really interested in Stacey's conspiracy theories. It was just impossible that El liked Mike. Period.

"Yeah, you should". El responded simply, still a bit pale.

They left and El was alone again. After Stacey's implications, El was convinced that it was vital that she went out with them on Friday. She was determined to erase any suspicions Stacey may have or any that she could have planted on Jenifer and Tammy with her words today.

Like hell they will know!

That Friday night, Mike and his friends were about to spend an epic night playing Dungeons and Dragons...

...after they ate at Benny's.

They had arrived at Mike's house promptly at six without really having planned anything for the night's refreshments, so after much debating they decided to go out and eat before the start of the game.

As they walked to the diner, Lucas and Dustin were arguing about... well, about something, as usual. Mike wasn't really paying attention to them. He was walking quietly behind Max and Will who were just following their friends' argument amusedly. Mike was, obviously, thinking about El. It seemed that was the only thing he did these days.

Today his thoughts kept going back to lunch time and their quickie in the AV room. It had been such a great experience: the thrill of being found out, the feel of her lips as she went down on him...He blushed profusely and looked at the floor, but not before noticing Will looking at him with a knowing smile on his face. Mike smiled back at him, still red as a beetroot. It was clear Will knew what or rather *who* he was thinking about.

Without noticing, they had arrived at Benny's. The sound of loud music playing and voices talking excitedly greeted them, as they entered and made their way through the rows of tables, looking for a free booth. They finally found one and sat down eagerly, Dustin already looking through the menu, desperate for something to eat.

Mike just smiled at his friend's antics as he joined them at the booth. Suddenly the song in the jukebox changed.

One, two

Doo doo, doo doo, doo doo doo

Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo

Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo huh

Yeah I know who you remind me of

A girl I think I used to know

Yeah I'd see her when the days got colder

On those days when it felt like snow

It was 'Catch' by The Cure, he must have heard it a thousand times by now, with El always playing their records at his house. A small grin slowly appeared on his face as he thought about her and warmth spread through his chest. He looked up from his menu on a hunch, subconsciously hoping to find El there. He couldn't see much from his place at the booth though and he only managed to see a couple dancing slowly to the song. He suddenly felt envious of the brown-haired couple, he wished it was him and El dancing, eating at Benny's, going to school together, being...normal.

Mike shrugged inwardly, shaking off his thoughts. He knew El wasn't there, she had 'movie night' with Hopper tonight, so the chances of finding her there were basically nonexistent. He went back to his menu and started perusing the food. He was as famished as Dustin, but he wasn't about to make a fuss about it like his friend had done.

"Well would you look at that, the whole cheerleading squad is here. Lucky us!" Max exclaimed, slightly too loud for Mike's taste and who had yet to see anyone from the cheerleading squad from his seat.

He opted to ignore Max and continued to look through the menu, still deciding on what to eat. He was too hungry to concern himself with gossip at that moment. However, Mike could not ignore Dustin's next words.

"Seems like Hopper got herself a boyfriend huh?" He commented, as his eyes drifted towards their classmates at the other side of the diner. El stood there alongside her friends, laughing and cozing up to some guy near the jukebox. They were very close to each other, dancing slowly to The Cure's song, but now they were facing in the direction of Mike's table.

"It seems so, who's the guy anyway?" Lucas asked as he scooted closer to Max, trying to catch a glimpse of their table.

"Beats me, I've never seen him in my life". Dustin said shrugging lightly and going back to his menu.

Mike suddenly felt cold.

El is here? And with a...guy?

Moving himself slightly in his seat, Mike could see clearly now: she was the female in the couple he had just seen dancing.

A feeling of foreboding took over his body.

For a moment he didn't dare to look again. He could feel Will's dissimulated gaze on him and Max's inquisitorial look, as if waiting for him to make a scene. With all the energy he could muster, Mike pretended he was fine for the next few minutes, until they ordered and focused on other topics of conversation. When everything was calm enough at their table he finally got a chance to sneak a peek again, half hoping he had mistaken her, half hoping she hadn't lied to him.

But to his utter disgrace, there was El, still dancing quite romantically with some asshole he didn't know. They were laughing quietly, intimately, their faces too close, almost touching. His blood ran cold and he wasn't hungry anymore; he could only feel the bile rising in his throat.

Will seemed to notice his distress and leaned over discreetly.

"Mike, are you ok?"

Mike nodded silently, not wanting to talk about the subject and knowing that he wouldn't be able to lie to his best friend in his face. 'Nodding' was the best he could do at the moment. He felt numb and wanted to return to his house, curl up in bed and forget tonight ever happened. And he definitely didn't want El to see him there.

The cold and harsh reality of things abruptly hit him, and he felt himself start to panic. How stupid he had been to believe that someone like El would like him, that she would...love him. She had simply used him, he had only been a toy for her own amusement.

But, what if she and the asshole were just friends?

No. One doesn't dance like that with a friend. And still, even if they were

just friends, why would she lie to me about going out with her friends?

There was also the never-ending feeling of disregard and underestimation surfacing once more in his head. Even if he loved her, even if he had surrendered himself to her with his heart and in his bed; deep down he had known from the beginning that she didn't see him that way. He would always be in the dark: the dirty, secret, guilty pleasure. Only that.

Suddenly Mike didn't want to be there anymore. He had to go home. *Now.*

"Guys, I umh...I don't feel very well. Can we do D and D another night? I need to go home". He said, as he got up and out of the booth.

"Dude what's up? We've been looking forward to this night for months now". Lucas said, feeling puzzled at his friend sudden decay.

"I know Lucas, I'm sorry but I don't feel well. I must be coming up with the flu or something". Mike retorted, sounding as miserable as he looked.

"Don't worry about it Mike, we can play another time". Will said reassuringly.

For once Max didn't comment and Dustin seemed to grasp that there was something deeper going on with his friend; he only nodded understandingly.

Without any warning an unwanted voice interrupted them.

"Well, well, well, is it me or is Wheeler here looking a bit green tonight?" Jennifer asked maliciously.

The cheerleading squad, along with their respective dates was suddenly standing in front of Mike and his friends. They were leaving the diner, walking past their table on their way out but not without stopping by to harass them.

Mike's face searched for El's, trying to find some semblance of logic to what he had seen tonight. Disappointment invaded him, however, as he saw her doe eyes filled with guilt.

His heart shattered right then. It was all the confirmation he needed.

"C'mon Jen, let's go". Stacey said, already knowing that her friend was ready to humiliate Mike.

"No, no, wait Stacey. I want to know, tell us Wheeler, are you secretly in love with El or something? You haven't taken your eyes off her and Blake for at least the last half-hour". She bluffed.

Jennifer knew El would never like someone like Mike, but that didn't mean she couldn't have some fun with the nerd, who, by the look on his face, seemed pretty much dismayed by the sight of El on a date.

Nobody spoke, as if waiting for Mike to explain. He didn't though, still looking at El miserably.

"Why don't you fuck off Jennifer?" Max intervened, already red with anger.

"Who cares Jen? It's not like El would hit *that* anyway, not even if he was the last guy on earth...right El?" Tammy said scornfully, making a disgusted face at the thought of Mike.

El's eyes widened at the mention of her name. She desperately looked for Mike's gaze, but he was looking away from her, trying to ignore the whole situation. After a moment though, his gaze was up, looking straight at her defiantly, daring her to answer.

"That's right Hopper, not even if I was the last guy on earth, right?" He challenged, blood boiling and calculating eyes on her. It seemed as if somehow Mike knew what was coming.

Say it. He pleaded in his head. *End this now.*

For better or for worse, because deep down he still held some shred of hope that maybe she wouldn't run from this, that she wouldn't say...

"I'd rather let the human race go extinct". She said quietly, almost painfully, avoiding his eyes.

...something like that.

This was it: El had finally shown her true colors. And for Mike it meant this was over.

For El, her comeback had the desired effect: her friends erupted with laughter, relishing in her words heartlessly and any doubts raised about her and Mike were dissuaded. Only Stacey looked at her as if she had grown two heads, disbelievingly and clearly feeling sorry for her friend.

To Stacey, El had just majorly fucked up whatever she had with Mike. What *she* 'suspected' El had with Mike, anyway.

Suddenly Max tried to launch at El from her place in the booth.

"You fucking b...!"

"Max! Babe no...!" Lucas said, quickly grabbing her and stopping her from attacking the brown-haired girl.

"It's ok Max". Mike reassured her flatly. His voice sounded cold and detached and it was El's turn to feel frozen.

"C'mon everyone, we should go". Stacey sensibly suggested.

"Yeah, get the fuck out of here!" Max was visibly enraged by now, barely able to contain herself.

They left, still laughing and joking around, and everyone at their table remained silent.

"Mike..." Will started, hesitant, not really sure about what to say to his friend.

"I need to leave". He said suddenly, turning around from the booth and starting to head for the door.

"Dude what...?"

"No. I'm sorry Lucas, I know you mean well and I'll explain everything eventually, but right now I need to be alone". His tone didn't leave room for contradiction.

They all looked at each other concerned but nodded anyway.

Mike nodded back and hurriedly left the diner.

"Wow. That was...weird. *What* is going on?" Dustin commented, clearly puzzled.

Will looked away, trying to hide his face from his friends but Max picked up on it.

"Byers you know something, don't you?" She asked firmly, pressing him with her gaze.

Will stared at her for a moment before sighing tiredly and nodding slowly.

"Yes. But it's not my story to tell. I'm sorry".

Surprisingly, Max didn't push. She only nodded and took a sip from her drink contemplatively.

"What? You mean something's going on between Mike and Hopper?" Dustin asked, sounding disbelieving.

Will nodded.

"Well, I'll be damned".

"That's fucked up man". Lucas managed to say, as he grasped the meaning of this new-found information.

"I think Will is right, it's not his story to tell. Mike will come to us when he is ready". Max conceded maturely, to the boys' surprise.

"And then, that bitch will hear me out". She finished darkly.

Meanwhile at Stacey's house, El was panicking in the bathroom. As soon as the words left her mouth back in the diner she knew she had ruined everything. She was still trying to understand why she had said something so hurtful to him.

How could she be so stupid?

Her reflection stared back at her, tired, jaded...ashamed. Tears were slowly, silently, streaming down her face. She closed her eyes, letting them fall and tried to think straight. She felt desperate, she needed to talk to Mike tonight, to apologize and plead for forgiveness.

All the way to Stacey's house she had thought about how her seemingly simple night turned into her worst nightmare. She had been having a nice time with her friends and even with Blake. He had turned out to be a nice a guy and she had been playing along for her friends' benefit: being extra flirty and cozy with him but never intending for it to go further than that; *he* wasn't Mike.

But then, she had fucked it up.

She couldn't be with her friends anymore. She had to leave.

A knock on the door startled her. She stayed still for a moment hoping to compose herself before opening the door, maybe even hoping that the person on the other side would go and let her be.

"El? Are you ok?" Stacey asked, the sound of her voice slightly muffled by the closed door.

El sighed, she wasn't in the mood to face her friend, but she knew it was inevitable. She unlocked the door and let Stacey in.

The blonde had the courtesy of remaining silent. She entered the bathroom and closed the door, looking at El contemplatively. Then she grabbed a wet cloth and approached her hesitantly, asking her mutely if it was ok to touch her. El nodded.

Stacey gently wiped her face, cleaning the remnants of her make-up and her tears.

"You should go and apologize". She suggested cautiously.

"I...I know". El acquiesced in a small voice, not even trying to deny the existence of their relationship. What was the point now?

"You can leave through the back door. I'll tell the others you weren't

feeling well".

El nodded.

"Thanks Stacey".

"Don't mention it. Let me know how it goes, will you? I'm kinda curious to hear the whole story some time". She told her smiling mischievously.

El gave her a timid smile.

"I will". She promised, taking her bag and opening the door quickly.

Then she practically ran.

Mike finally got home after what seemed like an endless walk. He took off his jacket and slumped tiredly on the couch. The pain he was feeling seemed to be on hold, as numbness took over him. He felt like crying though the tears wouldn't come.

It was strange for him, but tonight he had realized that maybe he had been expecting something like this to happen with El all along. It had been too good to be true from the beginning. He should have known it from the start.

He should have known that she could never love him, that El Hopper hadn't changed at all.

Mike wanted to drink something, he wanted to escape from himself tonight, to go really numb and forget this night ever happened. He wasn't just humiliated, he was deeply hurt. He didn't care if she wouldn't go public with him, as long as she was with him, as long as she loved him.

But tonight, she had proven that she wasn't with him and that she didn't love him. The guy she was with was proof enough of that. Never mind what she said about never touching him, not even if he was the last guy on earth.

He sighed and took his head in his hands. He felt frustrated, on top of

everything else he was feeling.

A frantic knock interrupted his thoughts.

"Mike! Are you there?" El's voice resonated through the basement door.

Mike wasn't surprised. It's not that he was expecting her or something, but he didn't have the energy to speculate on anything at that point. He got up and went to open the door: better to face her now than keep wallowing in his misery. Maybe facing this thing now would bring him some peace.

"Mike!" She said, surprised at his sudden appearance at the other side.

He didn't answer, he just stared at her. Numbly, coldly. Detachedly.

El cringed inwardly, assessing the damage she had done.

"I'm so, so sorry. It's not what you think..."

"I don't care". He managed to interrupt, still looking right through her, as if she wasn't standing in front of him.

She felt desperation slowly starting to creep in. Her throat began to hurt, and tears began to form in her eyes.

"Mike please let me explain..."

"There's nothing to explain" He said coldly, ignoring her searching eyes.

"No, I need..." She started hesitantly only to be interrupted by Mike again, only this time...

...he exploded.

"What?! What is it that you think you need from me?" He asked, practically shouting, this time looking straight at her.

She flinched at the harshness in his tone.

"I...I..." She tried to apologize, to say something but the look in his eyes dissuaded her; he looked so angry. Not her usually sweet Mike.

Well, what do you expect, you idiot? Not after what you pulled today...

"I' what? Huh?" He asked harshly

At her silence, he continued.

"What. Do. You. Want?" He asked, emphasizing each word roughly.

"I'm sorry, about tonight...it's not what you think it is".

"You already said that. I don't care". He stated, still standing at the door.

"Please Mike...Blake...he's just a friend".

"I don't care Hopper".

"Let me explain, please..." She pleaded.

"Explain what?" He snapped, already fed up with her.

El could only look at him sadly, desperately. Her tears were now running freely down her face. Mike, on his part, seemed unmoved by her pitiful looks, watching her rather contemptuously.

But even though he wanted to pretend he didn't care, the truth was that he did. Very much.

"So, Hopper, I'm good enough to fuck in the darkness of your bedroom, but not enough to be your boyfriend?!" He asked, angrily.

"Mike, it's not like that". She said trying, in vain, to rectify her mistake.

"Then how is it El? Because from where I'm standing, it seems to me that we don't have anything to say to each other".

She remained silent, to his utter frustration, so he continued.

"From where I'm standing, everything we've done, everything you've

ever said to me it's just bullshit". He said quietly, jadedly.

El's eyes widened at the severity of his words.

"No Mike, please...wait..."

"No, Hopper, I don't want to hear it. I'm done being your secret bitch. Find someone else".

"But Mike..." She tried weakly.

"Close the door on your way out". He said, as he turned his back on her and started to make his way towards the stairs.

Anguish consumed her right then as she saw him begin to leave and she knew she had to tell him now.

"But I...I love you Mike". She confessed bravely.

He stopped, death in his tracks, though he didn't turn around to look at her. She couldn't possibly know how much he had longed to hear those words come out of her mouth, but now it was too late.

He sighed, and he lied.

"I don't. You hurt me for the last time". Mike felt his heart being torn in two the moment he said it and his first instinct was to run as fast as he could. He refrained though, and his tears burnt in his eyes, but he refused to let them fall.

Dejectedly, Mike slowly started to climb the stairs again, only to stop briefly at the top.

"Do me a favor Hopper, pretend I died or something, will you? Don't ever speak to me again". He requested coldly.

And then he opened the door and exited the basement, leaving a devastated El behind.

AN/: I'm sorry about this chapter. Just know that the story was heading this way since the beginning, that's why it's called Boys don't

cry (if you read the song lyrics you will understand). However, there will *be* a happy ending (duh!) :)

9. Regret

AN/: Thank you for the lovely comments. I'm sorry I haven't replied much, I've been trying to finish this chapter every moment I have a few minutes to write. It might take a while, but I will finish this story :)

Chapter 9: Regret

It was around 10 pm when El got home.

She opened the door to her house to find Hopper comfortably seated on the couch, drinking some beer while munching on snacks and watching the news.

"Hey kid, you're early, I thought you would get home until much later". He commented casually, without really looking up to see her.

However, when she didn't answer right away he turned his head to look at her. It had been a long time since Hopper had seen his daughter looking like this. Her eyes were bloodshot, her nose was red and runny, and the expression on her face reflected unimaginable sadness. He didn't have the faintest idea of what could have caused her to look like this, but immediately he knew it was bad.

At the anguished look on her face he quickly got up and gathered her in his arms.

"Hey, hey, what's wrong?". He asked her softly, visibly worried.

The moment El felt her father's arms come around her she broke down. The weight of tonight's events came crashing down violently on her once more. She had barely made it home without breaking down and crying in a corner of some empty street. But now that she was home, engulfed in Hopper's protective embrace, she let go of everything.

Sobbing loudly, she clung to Hopper like a lifeline.

"Shhhhhh...you're ok, I'm here kid. Breathe".

El sobbed harder at the kindness in his tone and the feeling of his embrace. She tried to calm herself, but the tears wouldn't stop falling.

"I... I screwed up dad". She managed to say, between sobs.

"Hey, hey, breathe. C'mon, in and out...in and out..." He told her softly.

El listened to her father and tried to calm herself down a bit, at least to be able to tell him about what happened tonight.

"Dad, I did...something terribly...wrong". El barely managed to explain, hiccupping and on the verge of choking in her own tears.

Her whole profile made Jim Hopper think the worst.

"Talk to me El, I want to help". He said seriously, looking into her eyes and trying to determine what on earth could be this bad that would cause his girl to be like this.

Hopper let her go for a moment and went to the kitchen to get El a glass of water. She accepted it gratefully and succeeded in calming herself down enough to speak clearly.

"I've been dating Mike...well, more like we've been hanging out together in a...romantic capacity..." She said uncertainly.

"You mean you've been sneaking around with him?" He said arching his eyebrow sarcastically.

"Wait, Mike? As in Mike Wheeler, Will's friend?" At her nod of confirmation, he continued. "I thought you didn't like nerdy boys..." He remarked, almost teasingly.

Truthfully, he was almost glad that this was about a boy...unless she was about to tell him she's pregnant...

"Yeah..." She paused, not sure how her dad would take to the news that his baby girl had been seeing some boy without even introducing him to her father.

"Ok, let's skip pass the fact that you've been sneaking around behind

my back, and get to you telling me why you are crying so desperately, yes?" He said as comfortingly as he could.

She nodded gratefully and started her story. She was thorough and honest, telling Hopper how she had been a terrible person to Mike in the beginning, how popularity had gotten to her head and how she hadn't wanted anyone to know she was dating him because she was afraid of what people might say.

Obviously, she left out eerr...certain parts of her relationship with Mike...

Hopper listened quietly, frowning slightly as she delved into the more unpleasant details of her tale. She almost started crying again as she told him of tonight's events, watching as a flash of disappointment passed through his eyes.

That moment there made her feel ten times worse and silent tears started to fall again.

"Oh kid...you really messed up". Hopper remarked when he spoke after listening to her attentively.

A sob almost broke her as she sadly nodded in agreement. Her father managed to pull her again into his arms while she wept softly. He concentrated on running his hand comfortingly up and down her back.

"El..." He said firmly as he pulled away to look at her. "You have to apologize to the kid, yes; but you also need to stop beating yourself up for it". At this she looked at him puzzledly.

"What I'm trying to say is that it's no use to keep berating yourself over what you did. You need to put it behind you, ask for forgiveness and make amends".

El stared him contemplatively.

"That's easier said than done, Dad. I don't think Mike will ever forgive me". She explained sadly.

"You're right kid, but what other choice do you have? You have to at

least try. Forgiveness it's not only about apologizing to the person you wronged, it's also about the need we have for absolution and redemption. Peace will only come to you after that". Hopper explained softly.

"But Dad...what if he never forgives me?" She asked him, swallowing the dryness in her throat.

"Then he's not for you El, and you will need to move past this". He answered simply.

At her dismayed look, he continued reassuringly.

"I know it's hard kid, but sometimes that's just the way things are, and we have to learn to live with the consequences of our actions".

Even though El felt numb and sad, she nodded, understanding that everything Hopper was saying was the best advice she could receive from anyone. It brought her a small comfort that her Dad was there with her, comforting her and guiding her.

"Now, would you like some eggos? Tomorrow you can try to fix things with the kid, but tonight you need to eat and rest, ok?" He told her patiently.

"Yes Dad. Thank you. For everything".

"Anytime kid". He said, kissing her forehead tenderly.

Sunday afternoon found Mike in the basement hanging out with his friends.

After giving him some time to be by himself, Lucas called him on Sunday and proposed they all meet to hang out for a bit, to help him get his mind off...*her*. He gratefully agreed to see them, desperate for a distraction, even if meeting his friends meant having to explain all about his secret affair with El to them.

Maybe talking about it with his friends would help him. God knows spending Saturday in bed wallowing in self-pity hadn't helped one bit. He still felt so...sad. And he hurt so much. He knew it was naïve

to think that everything would be gone in the morning, but he had hoped that maybe he would feel a bit better by now. He was wrong.

"So, man...do you want to talk about it?" Lucas cautiously asked, taking a sip from his drink.

"Mike...buddy...we're not mad at you or anything...you know, for hiding your steamy romance with Hopper from us...ouch! What?" Dustin was prevented from finishing by Max's hand hitting his head slightly.

"Shut up Dustin!"

"Max it's important that he knows..."

"Guys, stop. Please". Mike intervened.

The room went quiet.

"I'll tell you everything. It's time you knew, anyway". Astonished by his equanimity, they just nodded and waited for him to begin.

So, Mike started his tale, from their first kiss to the fateful events that transpired on Friday night.

Lucas and Dustin listened astounded, while Will had a pensive look on his face and Max frowned moodily as he told them about his relationship with El. He felt bad about hiding this for such a long time, specially because he had been so happy during the last few months and not being able to share this with his best friends had made it gloomier somehow.

"...and well, we've been hanging out ever since". Mike finished sadly.

"Did you guys like do it and stuff?"

"Dustin!" They all chanted in unison.

"What? It's a valid question!" He defended.

"Yes, but it's crass and frankly none of our business". Will explained as if to a five-year-old.

"Fine, fine! I won't ask more about the sordid details of your relationship". Dustin finally agreed, albeit begrudgingly.

"So, what are you going to do now, man?" Lucas asked carefully.

"What do you mean what's he going to do? Nothing of course! Hopper showed her true colors on Friday, it's clear she was just using him". Max answered fiercely, before Mike could utter a single word, almost outraged by Lucas' question.

"This all sucks Mike. Good thing you're not in love with her or something". Dustin added absentmindedly.

Mike felt a pang go through his heart and he couldn't help but look at the ground defeatedly.

Or something...

"Oh". Was all Dustin managed to say as he realized what the downcast look of defeat in his friend's face meant.

His friends fell silent, awkwardly staring at their black-haired friend.

"Yes, 'oh'". Mike exclaimed, irritably sad.

"Look guys I don't want your pity. I know I made a mistake by trusting her, but I would appreciate it if you didn't make this worse by telling me I'm stupid. I'm very aware of how stupid I've been". He finished dejectedly.

"You are not stupid Mike, you fell in love, that's just being human". Will said wisely and his friends nodded.

"Yeah Wheeler, we're not here to scold you, we are here to support you". Max added, oddly calmed and for once, non-sarcastic.

"Thanks Mayfield". Mike answered, smiling slightly. "You too guys,".

They stayed there for a couple of more hours until it was time to go home. Will was the last of his friends to go and just before he left, he stopped before Mike at the door.

"I don't think she used you". He stated simply

Mike was caught by surprise and stared at him disconcertedly.

"What?"

"El. I don't think she used you". Will explained softly.

Mike closed his eyes in frustration. He really loved Will but sometimes his friend's tendency to see good in everyone was exasperating.

"Look Will I know you're sort of friends with her, but you shouldn't defend Hopper..."

"I'm not, I promise". He said in a solemn tone, waiting patiently for Mike to allow him to finish his thoughts.

Meanwhile, Mike observed him, quietly trying to decide if he wanted to hear what his friend had to say about *his*...his what exactly? His *ex*?

He sighed tiredly and nodded, motioning for Will to continue.

"The night of the party, when I found out about you guys, we talked for a bit as we walked home. I didn't get the impression that she was with you then because she wanted to hurt you".

"What do you mean?"

"She was unsure about going public with you because she was afraid of the repercussions for you. I'm not defending her, trust me; she was also afraid about her popularity going down the drain, but she was also worried about you". He paused.

"About how all of us would react to you and her, about her friends' reaction and about you being bullied because of her".

Mike looked skeptical.

"Really? Well, it didn't feel that she was even a bit concerned about me on Friday". He observed bitterly.

Will looked at his friend sadly. He could understand his pain, and yet he was puzzled at the whole thing. How was it that two people who clearly were so good together could hurt each other so much?

"There's...there's another thing". He began, still uncertain about telling Mike. "She was... unsure you felt anything for her".

Mike's eyes widened in shock.

"What?!"

Will nodded.

"Yes. El found it hard to believe you could feel anything for her. She said your relationship was only about being -and I quote- 'lustful teens taking advantage of each other'".

Mike was thrown by his friend's revelation.

Could it be that El had really felt something for him?

Then he remembered Friday night and his face fell.

"You say things I wish I could believe, but her actions speak louder". He told him.

Will agreed silently, sighing defeatedly.

"I don't know what to think Will...I want to hate her so badly, but all I can feel right now is pain and the hurt of knowing that I won't be able to be with her anymore". Mike explained dejectedly.

"Look Mike, she fucked up. Majorly. You definitely need some time to think things through. And god knows El needs to get her priorities sorted out...but maybe this is the wake up call you both needed to make things right". Will reflected wisely.

"What makes you think she cares enough for that?"

"I don't know, I have a hunch I guess". He said shrugging.

Mike contemplated his friend curiously.

"Why are you doing this?"

Will shrugged once more.

"Because you might be giving up on the girl of your dreams only because you're both stubborn and afraid".

Mike looked surprised by Will's words.

His friend chuckled and gave him an affectionate pat in the back before exiting.

"Don't look at me like that, you guys don't call me 'Will the Wise' for nothing".

That got a smile from Mike.

"Go, get some rest, eat some comfort food. You're going to be fine Paladin". Will finished reassuringly as he got on his bike.

"Thanks Will!" Mike shouted sincerely, as he saw his friend leave his front lawn.

On Monday El was a nervous wreck.

For one, she didn't want to face her friends, and yes, she obviously dreaded facing Mike. She wasn't capable of dealing with the rejection and disappointment she knew would adorn his face.

Sunday had been better than expected. She spent the whole day alternating between sleeping, crying and eating Eggos, much to Hopper's concern. But at least she had managed to shower. See? Better than expected.

But she was still inconsolable. Period.

Her talk with Hopper had helped, but she was far from being ok. She knew she had to talk to Mike again, beg for forgiveness and try to make things right. And she planned on trying again today, and the next day, and the day after that...until he listened.

Or at least that was the idea anyway: beg and beg until he realized she was just a silly girl who had majorly fucked up but that loved him, with all her being.

Curiously enough the first person she ran into that morning was Stacey, who just by looking at the gaunt countenance her friend presented, immediately knew things hadn't gone well at the Wheelers last Friday. Opting for not asking questions, Stacey helped El that morning to dodge the impertinent queries of her other friends: about her whereabouts on Friday after Benny's, about her date and whether there would be a second one...

El couldn't be more grateful to Stacey for helping her out.

Just before lunch, they had a moment to themselves and El told her everything that took place after she left her house on Friday night. Her friend listened carefully and felt sympathy for her. Stacey didn't really know the specifics of El's relationship with Mike, but it seemed that it ran deep for the brunette and seeing that they were far from being alright, she had to admit she felt bad for them.

On Mike's end, everyone was a bit edgy that morning, fearing the inevitable encounter that would surely take place between their friend and El Hopper.

"It would be a nice change to have lunch outside, don't you think?" Max suggested casually as the bell rang, signaling the beginning of lunch time for the students of Hawkins High.

They were walking together towards the cafeteria, looking forward to some much-needed free time and some food. Mike knew the suggested change of scenery was for his benefit, to reduce his chances of running into El and her companions.

He decided to humor his friends, and acquiesced. It's not as if he fancied running into her anyway. Far from it.

"Yeah, sounds good!" He said, trying to sound cheerful.

He was hurt, he was sad, but above all, he was emotionless. Mike felt

he had been walking through the motions since Friday night. He hadn't even allowed himself to cry, even though sometimes it was all he wanted to do.

He refused to let her have that. She had taken everything else, why should he let her have what remained of his dignity?

"Such a cool day, right?" Dustin commented, as they sat down comfortably under a tree.

"Yeah, it's great to be outside". Will agreed, taking out his lunch from his backpack.

An awkward silence fell, and Mike felt uncharacteristically responsible.

"So, guys, should we reschedule D and D for this Friday?" He asked, trying to make things less difficult.

"Sounds like a good idea to me". Lucas agreed enthusiastically.

"I was very excited about that campaign to be completely honest". Dustin added.

"Oh god, you're such a nerd Henderson". Max exclaimed, rolling her eyes.

"Uh...hellooo? Your boyfriend here is pretty much president nerd!" Dustin said in his defense.

"Uh...na-aahh, *VICE* president nerd. Mike is President nerd. Show some respect sir". Max added goodhumoredly.

They all burst out laughing and Mike couldn't help but smile a little.

His mood improved slightly, and he enjoyed the rest of their lunch hour quietly, thankful for his friends and their attempts to make him feel better with their silly jokes.

That is until *she* decided to show up.

"Hi". She said simply, greeting them all.

He heard her voice first and saw the surprised look on his friends' faces at her boldness. He wasn't supposed to face her so soon and she wasn't supposed to face him so easily. Or so he thought anyway.

"Mike, can we talk?" She asked in small voice, as if she were a scolded child.

At her question Mike looked up from the ground, ready to destroy every bit of hope she had for them, but her appearance dissuaded him. He was surprised by her haggard appearance, so unlike the El he had come to know.

Her eyes presented a reddish look and visible grey bags clung to them relentlessly. Suddenly, he felt a pang in his heart, and an abrupt urge to comfort her and make her forget, consumed him. For a moment he thought about letting go of every reservation he had about them, and just hold her tightly and never let her go.

But before he could say anything at all, Max intervened.

"Get lost Hopper". She said quietly, a fierce look adorning her features.

And the mirage vanished once more.

"Please...Mike". El pleaded softly, humiliatingly so, trying to not look at anyone but Mike.

His face hardened, and his eyes turned to ice.

"You heard Max, get lost Hopper".

He could see his friends give awkward glances to each other and Will's slightly conflicted countenance: he felt bad for El. Suddenly Mike felt ashamed of himself, he usually wasn't mean to people, he wasn't like El or her friends. His face fell for a moment, losing all the coldness it had presented just minutes before.

Feeling terrible, he gazed up again and saw the anguished look in her face at his words.

Abruptly, she turned around and left.

The uncomfortable silence that remained was quickly interrupted by Max.

"Well...that was awful. Have to go to the bathroom before class, catch up with you later nerds". She said and left quickly, before any of them could say anything else.

"You don't think she's going after her...do you?" Asked Will hesitantly.

"Oh my god, she's going to kill El!" Dustin shouted dramatically.

"Shut up, Dustin!" Lucas admonished.

"Dude, it's totally plausible". The curly haired boy stated as a matter of fact.

Meanwhile Mike had a faraway look on his face, contemplating the space where El had just stood.

"Guys, please, let's drop it, ok?" He asked quietly, though with underlying urgency. "C'mon, classes are about to start".

The boys nodded solemnly and walked quietly towards their classroom, with a lone Mike leading their way.

El was on the verge of crying for the umpteenth time in the last few days and she wasn't about to let Mike and his friends see her. She felt humiliated enough. For a moment she thought about Karma and regretted every bit of meanness she had shown to anyone in her life. She was paying dearly for it.

But El didn't care that much about humiliating herself, not if she could get Mike back. She would degrade herself gladly if that meant she would get to kiss him again.

Rudely, her train of thought was broken by Max Mayfield's sudden appearance before her.

"What do you want Mayfield?" She managed to ask in a terse voice.

"You have a lot of nerve chasing Mike around after what you did". She stated dryly.

El didn't respond, too hurt by Mike's treatment of her and even more so because she knew he and Max were right to scorn her.

"What? Suddenly the great El Hopper doesn't have anything to say?" The redhead taunted.

Again, El didn't respond. She stood firmly before Max, no uttering a single word, trying to remain calm and get through the encounter unscathed.

But Max kept on pressing.

"You are just a whiny little girl who thinks she's entitled to everything, aren't you?" She asked viciously, pouring salt on her wound.

El looked down but remained silent. Suddenly she was startled by a loud noise: Max's hands were at each side of her head, having hit the locker behind her violently.

El turned her gaze back to Max, now really scared by the redhead's sudden outburst.

"Well newflash princess, life doesn't work like that. You can't always get what you want!" Max said mockingly and let her hands drop to her sides.

"Stay away from Mike, you've done enough already". She threatened ferociously and with one last contemptuous look at El, she finally walked away towards her classroom.

El continued pressed against the locker, in deep shock about what had just transpired.

Tears fell freely from her eyes now. In part from shock, in part due to her own sadness. The tiny shreds of hope and what little optimism El had brought that day to school that maybe, just maybe, she could make things right with Mike; were swiftly starting to fade away.

The sound of footsteps broke her out of her daze. She cleaned up her tears slightly and started to walk quickly towards the exit, she couldn't stay in school anymore. At least not today.

Over the next few weeks El tried to talk to Mike on several occasions but to no avail. He avoided her like the plague. Either he ignored her, or he used his friends as a shield to avoid her. Max specially took her appointment as his pseudo bodyguard very seriously. Only Will seemed to be sympathetic of her, smiling at her apologetically every time she crossed them in the halls.

El felt herself starting to slip into despair, slowly fading away into her own guilt. She couldn't get over the fact that she had hurt Mike the way she had; she couldn't forget that she had ruined one of the best things that had ever happened to her.

Every day that passed she went through the motions, numb and hopeless. Hopper tried his best to cheer her up and was starting to seriously worry about her. Stacy was being a good friend, trying to be there for her, but El still felt abysmal.

Worse of all, her teachers were starting to take notice: she was quiet in class, detached of everything and she wasn't doing her assignments. Soon they would be calling Hopper, she was sure.

And cheerleading practice was a mess: she hadn't been to one single practice in a week. Tammy and Jennifer were getting suspicious; and there was only so much Stacy could do to cover up for her.

Her body was also beginning to suffer from her sorrow. These days she barely ate, and she wasn't sleeping very well. El was starting to look pale and gaunt.

In history class that day she didn't hear the teacher instruct them to pair up with their history project's partner until she saw Mike stand beside her desk silently. Apparently, they were supposed to talk about the presentation of their project next week. El had completely forgotten about that, and to be honest at this point she didn't care about it at all.

She didn't even care that Mike was seated beside her with a worried look on his face.

"Are you ok El?"

"Fine". She said noncommittally, avoiding his gaze. He didn't have any right to ask, not when he was the cause of her grief.

Mike kept looking at her with concern but decided against bringing it up to her again.

"So, I'm thinking we could split the presentation into two parts..."

The sound of his voice started to fade away as she shut him out of her mind.

But Mike quickly realized that she wasn't listening.

"El? Are you listening?" He asked softly.

"Yes, two parts, I get the first, you get the second, we present on Monday. Got it". She said flatly.

His eyes widened as she told him exactly what he had proposed just minutes before. He had been certain that she had been ignoring him.

Mike sighed tiredly and nodded resignedly. She wasn't going to say anything else today.

The bell rang, and she stood up quickly, gathering her things and shoving them into her bag nervously. When she was done, she left without a word.

"Right...goodbye El". He said to the air.

A feeling of guilt and dread settled into his stomach. El didn't look good. She seemed fragile and devoid of the vivacity that was so characteristic of her. When he saw her today, really saw her for the first time since the incident at Benny's, he was shocked to the core. She was thinner, paler and she looked like a shell of herself.

The lack of passion in her voice confirmed his suspicions that she

wasn't ok. And he felt immense sadness at the thought that she was hurting because of him.

She didn't seem like she was having a blast at his expense, laughing at him behind his back with her friends; she looked utterly miserable.

Had he been wrong about her? Will's words came immediately to his mind.

He had been so busy trying to deal with his pain and avoiding her at all cost that he hadn't looked at her properly in weeks. He was starting to second guess himself. Maybe he should have let her apologize to him. Even if he couldn't forgive her, at least he could have allowed her to speak her mind.

Had he been too harsh on her? Had he let his anger cloud his judgement? Had he been so stubborn by believing she couldn't feel anything for him at all? Had he been stupid about the whole thing?

Worst of all: had he been losing all this time away from her? Being miserable without hugging her, without kissing her, without listening to her voice and her silly jokes?

Worriedly, he gathered his things and left the classroom, plagued with grim thoughts about the girl he *still* loved.

I need to call Nancy. Urgently.

AN: I hope to be back soon :)

10. In between days

A/N: Here we go, chapter 10!

Chapter 10: In between days

When El got home from school that day she saw an unknown car parked in the Hoppers' driveway. It took a minute for her to realize that it was Joyce Byers' green Ford Pinto.

Oh.

El was very fond of Joyce, the older woman always treated her with respect and the loving care a mother would. Though she still wondered why she was there, specially without Hopper in sight.

"Hi Ms. Byers". El said quietly as she entered the living room.

"Oh! Hi sweetie". Joyce responded, slightly surprised to see El earlier than she expected.

"What are you...?" She started asking, but Joyce got ahead and explained before she could finish.

"Oh Ellie, your dad called me". She paused. "He's very worried about you".

"Oh".

"Come here sweetie, let's have some coffee and cake, I brought your favorite".

Even if she hadn't been eating much during the last couple of days, the thought of chocolate cake and coffee was too much for El to refuse.

"Ok". She said, giving her a grateful smile.

Joyce went into the kitchen, humming softly to herself as she poured the steaming liquid into two mugs and cut off the slices of cake. El

helped her getting the mugs and plates to the living room and they sat comfortably in the couch.

"Sweetie, I know you are having a hard time right now". Joyce told her softly, after sipping her coffee. She was looking at El compassionately.

"And that things feel hopeless, but you have to be careful. I know what it is to berate yourself constantly because you think you made a mistake. And yes, I'm not saying you shouldn't feel bad when you do something wrong, but you can't let your guilt consume you".

El sighed softly and looked down. She knew Joyce was right, she had to move on from her guilt and go back to being herself again. She couldn't let her remorse drive her to self-destruction.

"I know". She admitted after what seemed like minutes.

"Mike is a loyal and stubborn boy, it might take a while before he forgives you, but I have faith in him".

"What if he doesn't forgive me Ms. Byers?" El asked with uncertainty.

"Oh sweetie, then you will have to learn to live with that". She told her sympathetically, rubbing El's arm softly, trying to bring her some comfort.

"It hurts so much Ms. Byers, how can I move on from this? From him?"

"There is no method for it, Ellie, you just have to. Slowly, one day at a time. Start by trying to fight off any negative impulses you have: eat even when you don't feel like it, go to school, be with your friends, spend time with your dad; and little by little the small things will start to make you feel better".

El considered her words, she knew Ms. Byers was right.

Even before tonight, she had been considering trying to go back to her routine. She was so sick of feeling sad, of not being herself; of waiting for Mike. She was getting fed up with this attitude, hers and Mike's. She loved him, but she had to love herself more. She had to

forgive herself.

And if he couldn't forgive her, then maybe 'they' weren't meant to be anything at all.

Meanwhile at the Wheeler's household, Mike was waiting patiently for Nancy to pick up her phone.

"Hello?" Nancy's voice answered at the other end of the line.

"Oh! Hey Nancy! Can we talk?" He asked quickly, happy that he could finally talk to his sister.

"Oh, hey Mike, what's up?"

"I...I got hurt Nance...with El..." He said quietly.

"Oh Mike... I'm sorry. Tell me everything". She said understandingly.

And so he did. He told her what happened at Benny's, he told her how he hadn't wanted to know anything about El for a while, unwilling to even listen to any of her explanations, and finally, how shaken he had been when he noticed for the first time how fragile and jaded she looked.

"So...what do you think?" He finished uncertainly.

After a beat, Nancy answered.

"Well, think about it: why would she be miserable if she was playing you? Why is she hurting if you don't mean anything to her? Why does she want to apologize? If you were a joke to her, she wouldn't bother with you Mike. Not after getting what she wanted from you...if that was the case".

"You think she truly wants me? That she's not just toying with me?" He asked her, slightly hesitant.

"Mike, girls make mistakes too. Are you going to punish her for the rest of her life?" She said as a matter of fact, pausing briefly before adding: "Are you going to punish yourself too?"

Mike didn't answer, contemplating what his sister was saying.

"I know you're just kids in high school and that you think you have your whole life ahead of you to fall in love, that's true. But what if you're letting go of something amazing just because you can't forgive?"

"I suppose you're right". He conceded, though he was still doubtful.

"Talk to her, listen to what she has to say and then make a decision. And ask yourself this: are you willing to forget her? To truly get her out of your life and move on once and for all?"

No.

At his silence, she inferred his choice.

"Then there's your answer Mike".

"Thanks Nance".

"You're welcome little brother. Let me know how it turns out".

"I will".

"Good. Bye then, tell mom I said hi!"

He chuckled.

"I'll be sure to tell her. Bye Nance!" He said and finally hung up.

Nancy's words echoed through Mike's head. They made sense somehow. In the end it all went down to whether he wanted her out of his life for good or not. Was he willing to let El go?

He had a long weekend ahead of him.

On Monday morning Mike arrived early to school, he wanted to go through his notes for the presentation before the beginning of the lesson. As he made his way through the hallways of Hawkins High walking in the direction of his classroom, he began to feel slightly

anxious about seeing El again.

He had done a lot of thinking during the weekend, about what Nancy had pointed out, about his own feelings for El and about their ill-fated relationship. He was still confused and hadn't decided on anything yet. Mike was afraid of getting hurt again and regardless of his determination to fix things with her and forgive her, if only so she would be herself again; he felt uncertain about the whole thing.

These thoughts were still buzzing around his head when he got to the classroom. He stopped dead on his tracks as he opened the door and noticed the object of his tribulations quietly standing by the board, apparently rehearsing her part of the presentation. Mike couldn't help but observe her silently. She seemed better than she did on Friday and her jaded look had been replaced by her usual, proud stance.

Huh...

"Oh, hey Wheeler". She greeted as she looked up from her notes.

"Hi". He said simply, still puzzled by her change. Where was the girl from Friday?

"Are you...ok?" He asked slowly.

"I'm fine, just getting ready to nail this thing, you know?". She answered smiling slightly.

And he couldn't stop himself from smiling back at her.

Their moment was fleeting though, as the rest of the students began to make their entrance into the classroom. Soon their teacher arrived, and it was time to begin their presentation.

It went more than ok. El was wonderful in Mike's opinion, giving a clear picture of their work and explaining in detail the methodology they used and their findings. He was proud of them for a job well done, and he was proud of El for her thorough preparation, given the circumstances.

When the class was over, she came by to his desk and smiled hesitantly.

"That was pretty cool Mike, we did a good job".

Mike stopped putting things into his backpack and looked at her.

"Yes, we did". He agreed softly, contemplating her intently.

"I...I know things have been awful since that Friday..." She began hesitantly. "But I was hoping we could...talk?" She seemed visibly nervous now.

Yes.

He answered before he thought about it.

"Ok. We can talk".

Relief took over her face and she smiled timidly.

"Good".

"You can come over to the basement this afternoon..." He offered, rambling desperately fast.

It appeared his brain had made the decision before he even understood what was happening.

You're such a mouthbreather Wheeler...

"Hmm...sorry what?" She asked, puzzled by his unintelligible invitation.

"I said maybe we can talk at my house this afternoon?" He repeated, now clearly and articulate.

"Oh! Sure, that would be great. See you at 3:45?".

"Yeah, that sounds good". He said casually, trying desperately to hide his eagerness.

She smiled.

"Ok. I'm off to chemistry now. Bye Mike!" She said, feeling happier that she had in weeks: Mike genuinely seemed more likely to listen to

her now than in the last few weeks.

"Bye El".

Alone with his thoughts, nervousness sat quickly in the pit of his stomach, but Mike paid it no mind. He was determined to overcome his fears and solve this once and for all.

When the bell rang, Mike rapidly put his things away and practically ran to the bike rack to pick up his bike.

"And what's up with you Michael?" Dustin inconveniently asked.

Startled, Mike turned around to find his friends looking at him expectantly.

"Yeah dude, you virtually ran all the way here". Lucas added, agreeing with Dustin.

"Ah...I...I'm late for something".

"Hmm...it sounds like you're lying Wheeler. Could it be that you are off to meet certain air-headed cheerleader?"

He sighed defeatedly, knowing it was of no use to deny it.

"I'm worried about her Max, she hasn't been herself lately and I couldn't bear it if anything happened to her because of me".

"Mike's right though, she's been having a hard time, my mom told me about it after she talked to El last week".

"So, what if the princess is feeling guilty about what she did to Mike? Serves her right!"

"Max, I appreciate you trying to look out for me, but I must do this. I need to know her side of the story at least before getting her out of my life, if it comes to that anyway".

"Fine then, just don't come crying to us when she breaks your heart. Again". Max told him petulantly.

"Max..." Lucas started warningly.

"What?! I'm just saying! I don't trust her".

"Don't be so harsh on her Max, she's not that bad". Will cautioned softly.

"I just...well it's hard for me to like her after all the shit she put Mike through. Plus, I can't stand her *princess extraordinaire* attitude. Like everyone owes her something". She explained hotly.

"I know babe, but that's Mike's decision to make". Lucas told her wearily.

"Yeah Max and she's hot too so..." Dustin added as a matter of fact, very inopportunistly.

"Dustin!" Mike protested.

His curly-haired friend only smiled apologetically.

"Go on Mike don't be late". Will encouraged.

Mike nodded and quickly hopped on his bike.

"See you later guys". He said as he pedaled in the direction of his house.

At precisely 3:45, there was a knock on the basement's door. It didn't occur to El to knock on the front door, used as she was to go around his house through the basement. Promptly, the door opened, and a jumpy Mike let her in.

Seemingly, he also didn't expect her to use the main entrance to his house.

Silently, she made her way inside, looking around curiously, as if deciphering if there were any changes since she was here last. Meanwhile, Mike stood soundlessly, watching attentively as she perused the room.

"So...I guess I should start, right? Better to get this over with". She said decidedly, breaking the silence that had ruled their encounter from the beginning.

Taken aback by the sudden change in the air, Mike only managed to nod awkwardly, making a weak motion with his hand inviting her to sit on the couch. She did, and he followed. Now they were both facing each other, with El looking contrite but decisively self-confident.

She took a deep breath and begun.

"Sometimes I don't connect my brain to my mouth and I say stupid things". She said simply, before pausing for a short time.

"That day at Benny's the pressure got the better of me and I played along, still trying to keep 'us' a secret". She continued, and Mike observed her silently.

"I realize now that was a mistake. Everything about the way I handled things with you was a mistake, I should have given you your rightful place and loved you the way you deserve".

The revelation hit him hard and shock registered on his face, but he remained silent, allowing her to continue.

"And the thing is Mike... that yes, I fucked up...majorly...but you're not my life". El admitted solemnly.

His eyes widened, and he was about to interrupt but she beat him to it.

"I love you, like I never thought I could love anyone, and it took me a while to come to terms with that. Because of it, I made a mistake and I hurt you".

Mike could only look at her, not really knowing how to react to her finally admitting that she loved him. El kept going though.

"But I hurt myself too, you know? Even if you think I'm just some heartless, immature girl". She confessed sadly.

Suddenly he felt angry with her. *She* was hurt? *She* felt bad? What about him? He had felt like shit and *she* had felt 'hurt'? Irrational pain enveloped him.

"Will you get to the point, Hopper?" He snapped, exasperated by the sudden change in his own feelings. El Hopper made him feel uneasy these days, and he wasn't sure why.

She narrowed her eyes slightly, visibly annoyed by the change in his tone.

"Ok Mike. The point is that I've tried to apologize for this enough times and it ends now. What I'm trying to say is that I'm asking you one last time for another chance. To let me make this right". She said firmly, staring deeply into his eyes with determination.

Mike remained still, stonily gazing at her with serious eyes, but he didn't say anything.

At his silence, El continued.

"But if you don't want me...then this is it, I'm done saying sorry and I'm done suffering for you". She explained resolutely.

What El was saying sounded like an ultimatum, and in a way, it was. She didn't say it to pressure him into getting back together with her, although she would love nothing more. No. This was self-preservation. El needed closure, to move on with her life. With or without Mike...as much as the prospect of losing him definitively would hurt her.

In the meantime, he kept staring at her with a mixture of hesitancy and confusion at the admission that she was finally giving up them. *On him.*

This is what I wanted...right? For her to get out of my life.

For a while at least, he did. He wasn't so sure anymore.

Doubt clouded his mind as the response to his question, but El didn't wait for him to vocalize it.

"I guess I have my answer". She admitted resignedly as she stood up from the couch.

"Goodbye Mike". She said finally, as she reached the basement's door.

Her gaze was sad, though Mike could still see the purpose in it: she was determined to move on from him once and for all.

And then, El walked out of his life for good.

Or so he thought at the time, anyway, because ten minutes hadn't gone by when he snapped out of his haze and ran after her.

This can't be over. I don't want it to be over!

Everything he talked about with Nancy came rushing back. He wasn't going to give up that easily.

She couldn't be very far from his house, so he ran as fast as he could following the path to the Hoppers' household. Mike ran and ran for about 5 minutes until he reached Hawkins' main street, but there was no sign of El anywhere.

Panting heavily, he stopped in front of the local bookstore to recover his breath. Hands on his knees and bent over with exhaustion, a voice brought him out of his reverie.

"Mike!"

He looked up surprised and managed a weak but audible:

"El!"

She smiled softly and nodded as if confirming he was right, while he kept panting unevenly.

"I'm...I'm...I'm dying here, sorry..." He said sheepishly, between ragged breaths.

El couldn't help but giggle at the sight of him and his exaggerated comment.

"Give me a second...no, wait, better make it a minute..." He managed, while holding his index finger in warning but sounding more like desperate pleading.

"Take your time Wheeler, I'm here". She said goodhumoredly, though it seemed her admission held a another, deeper meaning to Mike.

She's not going anywhere. Not this time.

El gave him a small, reassuring smile and Mike tried not to melt on the spot: the vibrant El was smiling at him again. He smiled back at her between smaller gulps of air.

"I...could we talk for a bit? There are things I didn't say back at my house, things that I would like to tell you now..." He said as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"Sure, should we walk?"

"Yes". He agreed, and they slowly began the walk towards El's house.

They were silent again for a moment, before Mike finally spoke.

"I accept your apology". He said simply.

El felt relieved, all tension suddenly leaving her body and a smile taking over her face.

They stopped their march, right in front of the ice cream parlor and turned to look at each other. Mike continued talking.

"This hurt me El, a lot. I think I have loved you from the beginning, but I never had the courage to say it or to communicate what I really wanted from you..."

Her eyes widened at his heartfelt admission.

"...and I'm sorry for that. I shouldn't have continued with something that was dishonest to myself and to you".

El listened quietly, while Mike looked as determined as she had minutes before at his house.

"I want to start over El...if you want? Properly this time. Publicly and notoriously together".

She giggled happily and nodded her head affirmatively.

"Yes Mike, I want you. Properly this time around".

A huge grin took over his face and he grabbed her hands carefully, tugging her softly towards him and placing his arms around her waist.

"I love you El. And I'm sorry if I didn't say it sooner". He admitted fervently.

"I didn't give you much of a choice either Mike". El countered sheepishly.

"Well yeah, but..."

"No buts. I screwed up, we went all wrong about this and now we can do things right". She interrupted avidly, her face joyful and expectant.

He smiled and nodded, bringing their foreheads together in a tender gesture. They smiled contently, both ecstatic at the prospect of being together again. Without much thinking, Mike brought his face closer to El's, kissing her softly for the first time in weeks.

The kiss was sweet and innocent, like a promise of what was to come for them now that they had finally admitted what they truly meant to each other.

A/N: Dear readers, do you want this story to continue? I think I could write a couple of more chapters, maybe explore Mileven now that they are supposed to be happy together and the Party's reaction to them and to El in particular. What do you think?

11. Just like heaven

AN: Thank you for the lovely reviews and for wanting this story to continue. I also thank you for your patience in waiting for this chapter. After careful consideration though, I've decided that this one will be the last. It seems like a good place to leave Mike and El. Enjoy :)

Chapter 11: Just like heaven

Cloud nine was nowhere near enough to describe how El was feeling in that precise moment as she walked hand in hand with Mike through the streets of Hawkins. Gone were the sorrow and hopelessness she had felt during the last few weeks.

"El?" Mike asked softly.

"Hmm?"

"I'm curious about something". He said, as he caressed her hand tenderly.

"Tell me".

He seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then he asked.

"Why were you on a date that Friday night?"

This had been bothering him for a while and he was hoping El could reassure him that everything had been just a misunderstanding.

"I was out with Blake that night to appease the girls. They had been nagging me for a while now, about dating someone. So that day I decided to say yes, if only to get them off my back". She explained, looking at him carefully.

El was trying to convey trust with her eyes, she wanted Mike to know that she hadn't betrayed him on her 'date' with Blake.

He nodded and waited for her to continue.

"The plan was to go out with him, be friendly and never see him again. It was a group thing, so I didn't think it would be much of a problem. I could get them to leave me alone without having to confess that I was already hopelessly in love with someone else".

Mike could only smile cheekily at her explanation.

"Hopelessly huh?" He asked, turning around to face her properly and bringing his hands to her waist.

El responded in kind, putting her arms around his neck and hugging him closer to her.

"Very much so, Mr. Paladin". She answered, smiling softly at him.

"Just Paladin is fine". He joked, before leaning in to kiss her.

That night every kiss tasted like a new beginning for El. In contrast, Mike's arms were hugging her tightly, pulling her closer and closer; the underlying fear of losing her ever-present in his head since the start of their rocky relationship.

A car horn suddenly broke them apart from their passionate embrace. Without realizing it, they had arrived at Hopper's front lawn and the man himself was honking loudly, avidly trying to get their attention. The chief parked the car in the driveway and killed the engine.

Mike started to feel ill all of a sudden: Hopper had just caught them making out on his front lawn. Hopper, *Chief* of Police Hopper. Hopper, El's *dad*, Hopper. Hopper, who didn't know he sucked face with his daughter on regular basis.

Mike was pretty sure he was about to faint.

"Hey kid". Hopper greeted, kissing El on the cheek, but looking at Mike with a frown of his face.

"Hi dad". El said in kind, though somewhat nonchalantly.

"Good evening sir". He managed to croak.

"Is it, Wheeler?" He asked, still frowning; making Mike almost piss in

his pants.

"Dad be nice to Mike please. We, ah...we made up". She explained, standing beside Mike and taking his hand in hers.

"I sort of gathered that, you know, from the whole saliva exchange I just witnessed". Hopper told them, motioning to their faces and grimacing in fake disgust.

He was inwardly having fun with Mike though. The chief was more than happy that everything had turned ok for El and her boy.

Mike on the other hand, was debating whether to make a run for it or to stay and face the chief's wrath for corrupting his daughter. El made the choice for him though.

"C'mon dad, don't scare him away". El pleaded, playing along. She knew her dad was just having some fun with Mike.

"Oh, alright!" He huffed disappointedly. "Let's go inside then. I'm craving some pizza; you guys want some?" He asked them as he took off his hat and unlocked the door.

"Oh, definitely yes to pizza dad!" El exclaimed loudly, dragging an awestruck Mike behind her.

He was still recovering from Hopper's teasing, his heart beating fast and the numbness spread over his legs threatening to make him fall at any moment.

Overall, Mike and El had a good time dining with Hopper that night. The joy of being together again making them laugh good naturally at Hopper's teasing about their relationship.

This lovely reunion with Mike and the acceptance to their relationship given to them by her dad, had El happily making her way to school the next morning.

As she waved goodbye to Hopper's blazer, she noticed Mike parking his bike at the bike rack. A surge of fondness engulfed her, making her smile and blush profusely. With a spring in her step, she started

walking towards Mike.

Her boyfriend was distracted, putting on the chain around his bike and he didn't notice El walking in his direction.

"Hey Mike!"

"Oh! Hi El!" He exclaimed as he looked up, slightly startled by her sudden appearance.

Smiling, he went around his bike and took her into his arms, kissing her mouth enthusiastically. El moaned at the delicious contact and gave into the kiss, hugging him with equal vigor. After some minutes of delight though, they pulled away, aware that they were in public and still rather shy about flaunting their new-found happiness to everyone in school.

"Well, well, well Michael...I gather everything went okay yesterday afternoon?" Dustin inquired in a smug tone of voice.

El and Mike grimaced at the intrusion and turned to look at him, expecting to find a disgruntled Dustin. However, this was not the case, as he was looking at them with a toothy grin that evidenced his teasing nature.

Mike chuckled then, grateful to his friend for manifesting his support of El and him in the best way he knew how: by joking about it. He turned to look at El and noticed equal mirth in her eyes, seemingly enjoying Dustin's teasing.

"He even got pizza out of it!" She added jokingly.

"Oh Michael, she is a keeper!" He teased back.

"Yeah, she is". Mike agreed while staring at El lovingly.

At that moment Lucas, Max and Will approached the bike rack to meet their friends. Will was the first to say hi, being the affable boy he usually was.

"Hey guys! Hi El" He greeted happily, not making any observation about the unusual fact that was having El hang out with them on a

Tuesday morning before school.

Lucas greeted them on a similar fashion, while Max, begrudgingly, let out a dry 'Hi' that seemed to be prompted by her boyfriend's elbow discreetly hitting her in the ribs.

"So you guys are finally together now?" Will asked curiously, though without any ill intentions.

Mike and El looked at each other giddily before nodding affirmatively.

"That's great dude!" Lucas cheered sincerely.

"Ah...thanks guys". Mike said, a little embarrassed about being the center of attention.

An awkward silence fell and El took the chance to make it right with Mike's friends.

"I also want to apologize for...well, everything". At everyone's puzzled looks, she elaborated. "I know you guys love Mike and even though I already apologized to him, I feel it's necessary that I extend my apologies to you too. So, I'm sorry". She finished simply, looking at them expectantly.

Dustin, of course, was the first to break the ice.

"Hey if my buddy here is cool and happy, then I'm cool and happy Ellie". He exclaimed, smiling goofily and being overly familiar with the Chief's daughter...much to Max's utter dislike.

The redhead rolled her eyes dramatically but swallowed her words. The war against El Hopper was lost, she was wise enough to understand that.

"We're good Hopper". Lucas admitted sincerely, smiling at El while prudently avoiding Max's gaze.

"Yeah El don't worry, we're ok". Will added, giving her a gentle, reassuring smile.

El nodded gratefully and turned to look at Max.

And suddenly the air became thick with tension.

"Max? I really *am* sorry". She told her solemnly, hoping that Mike's friend would forgive her for hurting him.

Max didn't seem very convinced, but she nodded, nonetheless.

"Let's get something straight: I don't like you Hopper, but Mike does. A lot. So, for the sake of our friendship, I will be civil to you". She stated with ruthless honesty.

El knew Max wasn't so forgiving, but she had known that would happen and she didn't care. They didn't have to like each other. Max could remain as Mike's friend and she would continue to be his girlfriend for as long as he wanted her.

She and Max would just have to get along...or try, anyway...

"Fair enough". She agreed.

"Ooooookkkkk...knife anyone?" Nobody understood Dustin's awkward question. "You know, du-uh! To cut the tension off...?" Nobody answered, all looking awkwardly at each other.

"Uh...anyway...class?" Will intervened with uncertainty.

"Oh, yes! Classes!" Mike agreed, thankful for his friend's foresight.

"Yes!" Lucas agreed, taking the hint.

"Yes, definitely classes". El approved, smiling at Mike, not really minding Dustin's attempt to dissuade the tension between her and Max.

Max didn't comment and just started walking; the others followed, leaving a baffled Dustin behind.

"Oh, c'mon! It was a good one!" He shouted disconcertedly before rushing clumsily after his friends.

Right before the bell rang, El encountered Tammy, Jennifer and Stacey in front of her locker, apparently waiting for her to arrive.

"Hey!" She greeted, sounding deliberately cheerful.

"Hey El" They responded in unison.

The three girls looked at her expectantly, but Jennifer didn't want to wait much longer.

"So, rumor has it that there's something going on between you and Wheeler. Please say it isn't so El". She said, sounding slightly aggravated.

"Hmm, well actually...we *are* together". El answered pointedly.

"What?! You mean as 'boyfriend/girlfriend, swapping saliva and other fluids' together, together?" She retorted disbelievingly.

"Yes, Jen, exactly together like that". She confirmed, in a patient tone.

Stacey didn't seem surprised, she looked rather pleased for her friend; Tammy and Jennifer were another matter entirely. They were terribly shocked by the news that their fearless leader had just openly admitted she was dating a *nerd*. A nerd.

Jennifer got over her shock very soon.

"Way to go committing social suicide, Hopper". She commented drily, with an expression of distaste in her face.

"No wonder you have seemed down lately..." Tammy added petulantly.

"And why aren't you throwing a fit Stacey?" Jennifer asked, realizing that her friend had been suspiciously quiet about the whole thing.

"Oh grow up Jennifer, can you see she's happy? If she likes Wheeler, she likes Wheeler. Simple as that". She explained, shrugging indifferently.

Jennifer and Tammy gasped in unison, their eyes bulging suddenly as if leaving their sockets. They turned to look at each other, trying to understand what they were hearing: *Stacey was in favor of this this... thing?!*

"I cannot believe you!" Jennifer exclaimed. Then, looking at Tammy and then back at El and Stacey she said:

"We need time to process this". To which Tammy nodded and they left, murmuring amongst themselves, no doubt about El and her sacrilegious relationship.

"They'll come around El, don't worry too much". Stacey assured her.

El nodded quietly. She wanted to remain friends with Tammy and Jennifer, but if they couldn't see what she saw in Mike and understand what he meant for her; then she wasn't sure she wanted them as friends.

"So El, 'fess up: how good is Wheeler in bed?"

"Stacey!" She exclaimed, surprised by her friend's question.

"Oh c'mon, you know I want to know all the gory details. Judging by how happy you were before the whole Bennys' mess, he must have been doing things right". She explained, giving her a wicked smile and a wink.

Taking in her teasing tone didn't stop El from blushing,

"Oh god, is it your only mission in life to embarrass me?"

"Of course sweetie, especially after I helped you to sneak out of my house that time, you owe me". Stacey teased.

El groaned in annoyance.

"I just need to know everyyyyyythingggg about this steamy, hot and clandestine romance of yours and innocent, nerdy Wheeler". Stacey explained, still teasing her heavily.

Knowing she didn't have a choice, El gave in.

"Ohhhh, he's not that innocent, believe me!" El admitted, rather flushed.

"A-ha! I knew it! So he is worth all this trouble you've been through". She stated knowingly.

"Yes, he is worth everything..." El agreed dreamily, before sobering up. "And not just because he's good at sex, you know? He's...he's just wonderful". She paused while Stacey looked at her amusedly.

"He is super kind, thoughtful and he does this thing with his tongue..." El trailed off as she realized what she was saying. She felt her face grow hot and her embarrassment mock her as she covered herself up, avoiding Stacey's glinting eyes.

Her friend on the other hand was having the time of her life, laughing wholeheartedly at El's predicament.

"Well, well, well, would you look at that? The Ice Queen is truly in love. No wonder you didn't want to date anyone, you were banging him all along!" Stacey teased mercilessly.

"Oh shut up Stace". El admonished playfully, giving her friend a bright smile that acknowledged the truth of her words.

Yeah, Stacey was definitely right: she was a goner.

Things went back to normal rather quickly. Little by little everyone got used to seeing El, the ever so popular cheerleader hanging out with Mike Wheeler and his band of nerds; and somehow nobody seemed to care.

The truth is that everyone is always so busy dealing with their own pain that there is never enough time to concern yourself with the comings and goings of other people, even if at first the gossip might seduce you to pay attention to them, give it one week and nobody will remember about it.

Mike's friends warmed up to El rapidly, with Dustin and Lucas always goofing around and teasing the young couple. Will obviously liked El a lot, as he had for a long time and Max, of course, was still unhappy

about having to tolerate the cheerleader amongst her circle of friends. You can't always get what you want.

On that particular Friday Mike was a bit edgy, he had a date with El, a very special date. He had been planning it for a while now: a picnic under a blanket fort in his basement, white Christmas lights and every record The Cure ever made playing in the background.

A couple of days ago he had been tidying out the basement, under his mother's orders of course, and he had found an unused turntable. A genius idea occurred to him then: he could fix it and get every record by The Cure for El. So after fixing it, he took some of his savings, went to the record store and bought the seven vinyls the band had recorded up to that point.

It was five o'clock already and El would be arriving at six. Everything had been set up nicely: he had the picnic basket filled with fruit, cheese, bread and of course Eggos with maple syrup; plus, he had gotten Dustin to persuade his friend Steve to buy him a bottle of wine to mark the occasion. And his parents were away with Holly on a school event. What more could he ask for?

Moreover, now that the time was fast approaching for him to be with El, he found he wasn't as nervous as he had been in the morning at school; now he just wanted to enjoy his time with El fully. It had been a while since they had been away from the prying eyes in school and he wanted to create a memorable occasion for themselves.

The picnic basket sat peacefully on the kitchen counter, as if waiting obediently for Mike to pick it up and take it to its final destination. Happily, he went into the kitchen and grabbed the basket. He checked inside for the ninth time that afternoon that every item of food was there, before making his way downstairs to the basement.

Upon his arrival, he placed the basket carefully on the blanket, he checked the lights, the records and the turntable; everything was ready.

The minutes passed slowly as Mike sat uncomfortably on the couch. He had entertained himself with a book as he waited for El, but so far, he hadn't gotten past the first page. A knock on the door

interrupted his musings, he looked at his watch in panic: *6pm! Where did the time go?*

Another knock made him jump from the couch and in a flash, he was in front of the door. He quickly opened up and El came in, sporting a bright smile and matching white shorts. Immediately she clung to Mike's neck and kissed him thoroughly in greeting.

"Hi". She said simply as they finally came up for air.

However, her focus on him lasted no more than a few seconds, before Mike could utter a single word in return, El was walking inside attracted by something else. She had seen the lights and the blanket fort, and like fish looking at a shiny object her attention was lost for good. Or well...for the next five minutes at least...

"Mike? What's all this?" She asked, still enthralled by the sight.

Mike smiled sheepishly before answering her.

"Well...I wanted to do something special for us...you know, to celebrate that we are in a real relationship now". He explained, somewhat nervous. Even now he was afraid that it was all a dream, that he and El were still playing 'hide and seek' with each other and not in a steady relationship...

"Are those...? Is that...The Cure's entire record collection?" She asked, her tone filled with awe.

He had set every vinyl on display on the coffee table, so it was one of the first things one noticed upon entering the basement. Besides, 'Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me' was already playing softly in the background, so 'The Cure experience' -as he called it in his head- was now a reality.

"This old turntable was just lying around here, unused and broken, so I fixed it and decided to buy every vinyl by The Cure ever made...for you..." He explained, sounding slightly embarrassed at the ridiculousness of his grand gesture. Of course, El didn't think it was ridiculous at all. She was actually melting away slowly.

"God Mike...you're...unbelievable". She said, overwhelmed and emotional, while she looked around paying closer attention to every

detail of his surprise.

"This is just...gorgeous". She said finally.

El was looking at him now, eyes full of love and a soft smile that made him want to kiss her forever. Before he did though, she was already kissing him softly.

"Thanks for all this".

"Oh it's nothing really, just some records and a blanket fort". He said blushing profusely.

"And a picnic, and lights, and my favorite band, and you; this is everything Mike". She said smilingly, mildly amused by his modesty.

She kissed him again and pulled away quickly, taking his hand and leading him towards the fort.

"C'mon, I can't wait to see what's in the basket".

As they sat down, Mike opened the basket and started to take the food out while he chatted.

"So, how are the cheerleaders? Still plotting a coup against you with a side of my 'accidental' death in the process?"

"Hahaha, sort of...I guess...?" She said puzzledly. "I don't really know what's going on with them these days, I mean, we basically practice together and that's it. I mostly hang out with Jennifer after school or with you and your friends". She paused.

"To be honest I don't miss them that much". She told him honestly.

He nodded slowly, not really knowing what to answer at her admission.

"How's Max? Still hating me?" She asked curiously.

By now it was common thing for them to ask about each other's friends and their dislike for their relationship. It was almost a mutual joke really...

"A bit I think, but you know, Lucas does a fairly good job at calming her down every time your name does come up". He answered jokily.

"Yeah...I don't think we'll ever get along to be honest". She said resignedly as she took the proffered glass.

"Well she's gonna have to get used to you".

El chuckled.

"I guess she will, I don't plan on giving you up any time soon". She agreed softly, while looking at Mike with seriousness in her eyes.

He smiled shily and took her face in his hands carefully.

"Me neither". He said, before finally kissing her lips.

She tasted as she always did, like cherry Chapstick and exhilaration; like freedom and desire. Mike could only feel grateful that life had brought them together, he felt so decidedly happy these days. He was content, as if he didn't have a care in the world. That's how she made him feel.

"I love you El, and I want to keep loving you for a long, long time; for as long as you'll have me". He admitted hotly as they ended their kiss.

She smiled softly at his declaration.

"I love you too Mike and I want all of that too". She responded solemnly. "I even want you to have my babies". She added jokingly as an afterthought.

Seeing the mirth in her eyes he burst out laughing.

"Your babies huh?"

"Yep, all the little Els, and maybe little Mikes".

"And when do you think this 'having of the babies' might happen?" He asked teasingly.

"Oh I don't know...maybe in a couple of years...? After we've gone to

college and become real adults with successful careers?"

"Hmmm, interesting. So that leaves us with a lot of time to practice, 'cause, you know, 'practice makes perfect', and all that trite stuff people usually say".

"Oh yes, you're definitely right. Wise people that one". She agreed, sipping from her glass and giving him a suggestive look that made his pants feel just a little bit tighter.

"C'mon baby momma, let's eat before you devour me with your eyes".

She laughed wholeheartedly.

"Fine, fine, I promise to respect your virtue. Until we're done eating, of course. Afterwards I can't promise you anything". She said mock-seriously.

"Good enough El, good enough". He responded playfully.

And as he passed El her plate, he couldn't help but smile inwardly at the thought of a life with her. Of having her babies and sharing a home with her. With the cheerleader from hell that loved eating Eggos and singing The Cure songs loudly in the library.

He chuckled. Life *was* full of surprises.

AN/ That's it folks! I hope you enjoyed the story :)